UNCLE FRANK'S

MARY

CLEMENTIA

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UNCLE FRANK'S MARY

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BY

"CLEMENTIA"

SISTER OF MERCY

St. Patrick's Academy, Chicago

Feehan, Sister Mary Edward

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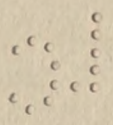

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To

MARY,

Mother of Mercy,

Our Life, Our Sweetness,

and Our Hope.

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Uncle Frank's Mary

CHAPTER I.

IN THE TRUNK ROOM.

"If Sister Austin thinks I can get all these things into one little bit of a trunk, I'm afraid she'll be disappointed," and Mary Selwyn laughed a happy little laugh that was good to hear. Then a perplexed pucker appeared on the fair forehead. "I really don't know where to begin," she sighed, seating herself on a neighboring trunk and hopelessly surveying the great pile of dolls, games, books, and those inevitable boxes so dear to the heart of every school-girl.

Rising suddenly, she continued, "Well, I'll do my best. It says on the black-board in our room, 'Do your best; Angels can do no more,' and I *have* tried to do my best this year. Won't mother be glad when she hears that I've won the class-prize? Oh, I can hardly wait until she comes! If someone would only invent a railroad across the Atlantic! I'm sure a train can travel faster than those poky old boats." The little maiden sighed, as she thought of the many, many leagues still between that loved mother and her own small self. "Guess I'll start with the dolls. Here, Ted," to the big white bear, "you're soft, so I'll put you in first. It won't matter so much if you do get squashed," and unresisting Ted was stowed away in the very bottom of the trunk. Gently and tenderly the little girl lifted the various members of her large doll-family with a word of farewell for each as she placed it in the trunk. First came Amelia Anabelle, her eldest and best-loved dolly, the parting gift of the dear, dear father to his sick little daughter. More than two years ago he went to a foreign country, then to Heaven, without even coming home to say good-by; and as she laid Amelia Anabelle in the trunk, a big tear splashed unheeded on the

doll's upturned, unsympathetic face. The little girl realized her loss far more than the grown folks thought, for she was older in many ways than the majority of children of her age. The first seven years of her short life had been spent altogether in the company of her parents and uncle, practically as an only child, her little brothers having died in infancy. Three months after her seventh birthday, when the family circle was enlarged by the birth of her twin sisters, Mary's joy knew no bounds, and she immediately began to assume the duties and exhibit the motherly solicitude of an elder sister. She did not, however, lose any of her affection for her silent companions of former days, but bestowed on them more care than ever in order that they might be in the best possible condition when her little sisters should be old enough to enjoy them.

Brushing away her tears, she turned to Topsy and Tom, colored dolls, aged servitors in the family, who, side by side with the Japanese doll in her gorgeous robes, the little Eskimo, the gay sailor boy, and the brave soldier, found snug places; then the beautiful doll Uncle Frank gave her on her last birthday, and so on, until all the dollies, large and small, white and black, were packed safe and sound in the little brown trunk. With a sigh, partly of relief, partly of regret, Mary rose to her feet and surveyed her remaining possessions.

"Mary! MARY! *MAY-REE SEL-WYN!!*"

"That's Wilhelmina," said Mary, smiling a little. "Wonder what she wants now. She's always in some scrape."

The door of the trunk-room was flung open, and in ran a black-eyed, dark-haired child of nine, her short tousled curls setting off to advantage her flushed, animated little face.

"Found you at last, thank goodness! Wish you'd stay in a more civilized place. I've been everywhere from the garden to the dormitory, and *there* was Sister Austin as cool as you please, and such things going on! Do

stop that nonsense and listen,'' insisted the impetuous little lady, drawing Mary, none too gently, to a place beside her on one of the trunks.

''I *am* listening,'' said Mary.

''You must give me 'your whole and individual attention,' as Sister Dominic would say. This is a matter of importance to you as well as to me. *Mother's here!*'' and Wilhelmina seized hold of poor Mary with such vehemence that the latter slid off the big trunk dragging her companion with her. The two children, laughing merrily, picked themselves up and resumed their lofty seat. They were indeed a pretty picture as they sat there in striking contrast to each other. Pale, fair little Mary, though nearly a year older, could not compare in size and strength with the large, healthy-looking child at her side.

Wilhelmina continued, ''Yes, she's here at last—came for Commencement. Just think! I haven't seen her since Christmas.''

''And you left her and came way up here to tell me?'' asked Mary in astonishment. ''When *my* mother comes ——''

''Of course I didn't, you goosie. I had her all this glorious afternoon, and now she's gone; but she'll come again tomorrow and wants to see you. Oh! I'm going home, Mary, 'I'se gwine back to Dixie'. Home to father and the boys! I have only eight brothers you know, and such times as we'll have! You don't know what it's been for me to be cooped up in a boarding-school and to hear that everlasting *Wilhelmina* ding-donged into my ears.''

''Why, isn't that your right name?'' asked Mary in surprise.

''Oh, course it is, more's the pity,'' answered Wilhelmina. ''I was called after an old maid aunt, father's only sister. She was mad 'cause none of the boys were named for her, though Phil's name *is* Philip William; but that didn't satisfy her so the burden was laid on *me*,

and I have to go through life with such a name. But never mind, I'm going where I won't hear it for ten glorious weeks. Of course, mother tries to be proper and calls me the whole of it, and it was she who put the nuns up to it; but you won't catch the boys doing it. They always say *Will,* or *Bill* even, when mother's not around. If you've ever had anything to do with boys, you ought to know that *Wilhelmina* is entirely too long and stylish for them. But you've lived all your life with grown-ups, so of course you don't know anything about boys. My brothers are disappointed, too, 'cause I'm a girl. You see, if I were a boy, we'd have a base-ball nine right in the family. Just the same, I can play as well as any of them. But I haven't told you half. We're going to leave here the day after Closing *and you're coming, too!* No," as Mary attempted to remonstrate, "mother will *not* take a refusal, *so there!*" declared Wilhelmina, giving her head an emphatic shake that set every saucy curl bobbing.

"But Wilhelmina——" began Mary.

"No buts in *this* case," said Wilhelmina, decidedly. "You're coming."

"I'm not."

"You are."

"I can't."

"You can."

"Now Wilhelmina——"

"Now Mary——" and the two burst into a hearty laugh.

"I have some good news, too, that I must tell you," said Mary, "but I'll have to finish this first. Sister will wonder what is keeping me so long, and if I begin to tell my secret, the supper-bell will ring before I'm half through."

"Let me help," said the other. "I thought Sister packed all the trunks. She did mine."

"Mine, too,—that is, the one with the clothes in it;

but these are things that I am going to leave here all summer and she thought I could put them away myself. I didn't know what a job it would be or I think I'd have asked her to help me," sighed Mary. "I've been here 'bout an hour, and that's all I've done," waving her hand toward the trunk.

"Never mind, I'll help you," and Wilhelmina picked up a pile of books. "Well, Mary Selwyn! I don't pretend to know much about dolls—never had but one in my life, and the boys hanged her on the tallest tree they could find—but I do know better than to put them in the very bottom of a trunk and pile books and boxes on top of them. Here, take them out and put them in the tray, while I attend to the books and things."

Mary obeyed, meekly enough, only too glad to have someone to direct the proceedings.

"Why don't you give away a lot of these things?" continued her companion. "I s'pose you never look at half the books, and poor children would be glad to get them."

"I can't," answered Mary in a low voice, which made Wilhelmina turn and look up at her. "I've often thought of doing it, but some of them are premiums that mother hasn't seen; others have been given me by those I love; and I'd rather give my spending money to buy things for the poor than to part with them, especially those that father gave me," she declared, with a catch in her voice that caused the other child to turn with renewed energy to the packing. Mary went back to the dolls and the two little girls worked on in silence. Wilhelmina wished that she could think of something to say, but somehow she just couldn't. She had led such a sunny careless life that sorrow was a stranger to her. Much to her relief, Mary finally broke the silence. Her voice was quite steady as she said, "My part is finished and I s'pose you've been waiting for me. If you'll take hold of the other end of this, I think we can lift it."

At last the tray was safely put in place, the trunk locked, and the key attached to a chain about Mary's

neck. There was a pretty locket on the chain which Wilhelmina noticed without, however, remarking it.

"Now I must tell you *my* good news, and then you'll see why I can't go home this summer with you," began Mary, drawing a letter from her pocket. "This is the reason I was in such a hurry to pack. Let's go down to the yard. It's so stuffy up here."

Arm in arm, the two children left the trunk-room and made their way to a shady spot on the grounds where Mary told her secret.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER AND SOMETHING BETTER.

Some thirty miles from the big bustling city of New York, on the outskirts of a quiet village, stands the Convent of Maryvale, where little Mary Selwyn had spent more than two years of her short life. The Convent was surrounded by spacious grounds over which the children romped to their hearts' content.

When the two little friends had comfortably settled themselves on a rustic bench some distance from the other children who were enjoying a last romp before supper, Mary again produced the precious letter.

"From your mother?" questioned Wilhelmina.

"No, from Uncle Frank. But there's something in it from mother, too," replied Mary, handing Wilhelmina a folded paper. "Read it out loud. I've read it 'bout forty times, and I guess I'll read it forty times more before I go to bed. It's almost too good to be true."

Wilhelmina unfolded the paper and read: "We sail on the *Helena,* from Liverpool, Wednesday, June 8. E. M. Selwyn."

"Isn't that grand?" cried Mary, clapping her hands. "You haven't seen your mother since Christmas; but how would you feel if you had no mother near you for three Christmases and three birthdays and three everydays?" and the poor child broke down completely.

Wilhelmina, utterly dismayed, put her arms around her sobbing little friend.

"Don't, Mary, please, *please* don't. Tell me what this paper means. Do, that's a dear. Who are *we?*"

"Why, mother and the twins, of course," said Mary, drying her tears. "Excuse me for being a goose, but I'm so excited about it all."

"No wonder," responded Wilhelmina, sympathetically. "But I wish you'd tell me about the twins. I just love babies, and you never talk about them."

"It always made me too lonesome. But I'll talk about them now, and *to* them in a few days. Listen to Uncle's letter: 'Dear little Girl—This cablegram just arrived and you must have the joyful news at once. I telephoned to the docks and found that the *Helena* is due here on the fifteenth. If I can manage my business engagements, I shall call for you that morning so we can go together to meet the steamer. If not, I shall bring mother and the twinnies out to the Convent, Thursday morning, in time for the Exercises. Will see you, however, Sunday, when we can talk over all our plans. Ever your devoted Uncle Frank.' "

"I should think that *is* grand," declared Wilhelmina. "Now tell me about the babies."

Before speaking, Mary pulled out the locket which Wilhelmina had already noticed. It was about the size of a quarter, and when a tiny spring was touched, the locket flew open, disclosing four little compartments each containing a photograph. Mary placed it in Wilhelmina's hand saying briefly: "Father, mother, Berta, and Beth."

"How pretty!" exclaimed Wilhelmina. "I never saw one like it."

"Father and mother sent it to me for a birthday gift, the first lonely birthday I ever had. The babies weren't a year old when those pictures were taken so you can't tell much about them. Mother says that Berta looks like father—dark curly hair and brown eyes. Beth is like mother and me. It seems just right that it should be so, because Beth is named after mother, Elizabeth, and Berta is really Roberta. Father's name was Robert, you know. Two years ago last November, he had to go to Rome on business—I don't know exactly what kind—but one thing about it that I didn't like was that he had to live there for a year. Of course, mother wouldn't let

him go alone, and she couldn't leave the babies, so they all went with father. She took old Aunt Mandy, too, a colored nurse who had lived in mother's family for years."

"But why," interrupted Wilhelmina, "why in the world didn't you go, too?"

"Wait," responded Mary, "I'm coming to that part of it. I was sick—had the measles, then got pneumonia, and though I was nearly well, Uncle Frank, he's a doctor you know, said I'd get worse again if they took me on the sea. So they left me with him, and O Wilhelmina! he's been the best uncle any little girl ever had. I'm afraid to say I like a thing, because he's sure to get it for me right away."

"Catch me being afraid to have folks get me what I like!" exclaimed Wilhelmina.

"Why, you know very well, Wilhelmina, there are lots of things that we couldn't have here; and men don't always understand," said Mary, in a superior tone. "Well, when I got over the sickness, Uncle Frank took me down South and we had a glorious time. We came back to New York late in April; then I came here to school. During vacation, we went up to the mountains, and last summer we spent out West; but I've been here more than two whole school years. Father died last May," she continued, now speaking rapidly in a low, strained tone, "but oh! I can't talk about it. Mother wanted to come home, but the shock made her sick, and she wasn't able to travel until fall. Then Beth is not strong, and the doctor said she couldn't stand the winter here after the mild climate of Italy, so that is why they waited so long. But they're coming; coming at last!" and Mary seized the locket, kissing it passionately.

"Mary," said Wilhelmina, "your secret is a billion times better than mine. Just imagine what a meeting it will be. Your mother is Mother Madeline's and your Uncle Frank's sister, isn't she?"

"Yes, Wilhelmina, and they are the only relatives I know. My father's people would have nothing to do with him after he became a Catholic. He never spoke of them, and we were so happy together that we didn't miss them. But there's the supper bell."

The two little girls sprang to their feet and raced across the grass toward the house.

CHAPTER III.

MAKING PLANS.

Mary woke the next morning with a vague feeling that something was going to happen. Then the memory of the cablegram flashed upon her, and springing up, she began to dress hurriedly, first breathing a tiny prayer that God would protect all her dear ones during the coming day. "I will have a long problem to work in arithmetic," she thought. "Wonder how many miles from New York to Liverpool? I s'pose I ought to know, but joggerfy isn't my favorite study. I wish now that I had paid better attention to it. If it takes the *Helena* eight days to get here, by dividing the miles by eight, I ought to find out just how much nearer home they are every day. This is Thursday. Goodness me! Uncle Frank won't come till Sunday, and even then I'll have to wait three whole days and nights before I see mother and the babies. And dear, old, black Aunt Mandy. I s'pose she'll call me 'honey chile' more than ever now. I'm so glad she's with poor mother,—she'll be such a help with the twins. Dear me, there goes the Mass bell and I'm not half ready."

Hurriedly finishing her toilet, she snatched her veil, and ran to overtake the others, who were by this time almost in the Chapel.

Long and fervently did the child pray for the safety of her loved ones. How she wished that she was among the happy number who received Holy Communion that morning; but though she had not yet made her First Communion,* she had early been taught to desire ardently the coming of the Divine Guest into her little heart and to make frequent Spiritual Communions.

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*The decree of our late Holy Father, Pope Piux X., concerning the First Communion of little children, had not at this time been issued.

After Mass the children went to breakfast, then for a romp in the yard, before returning to the dormitories to make their beds and put all in order for the day. Many of the older girls had private rooms, and, though children of Mary's age usually slept in the dormitories, Mrs. Selwyn preferred that her little daughter should have a room to herself. So when Mary came to the Convent, the furniture, pictures, curtains, and knick-knacks, which had been in her own room at home, were sent also, and helped to lessen the lonely feeling that so often crept into the little heart. The child took great pride in keeping the brass bed bright and shining, so that Uncle Frank, who was taken to see how cozy his niece was in her new home, declared that it looked like the fire-department. The pretty satinwood dresser, its linen cover daintily embroidered in forget-me-nots; the hand-painted china toilet articles, also in blue and white—"Mother's work," as Mary lovingly told her little friends, who went into raptures over all the pretty things; the soft mull curtains, looped back with pale blue ribbon; the writing desk to match the dresser; even the very wall-paper, seemed expressly made for the fair little mistress of this abode. It was here Mary came after the morning outing, and when she had put all in order she once more took from her pocket the precious cablegram. "I can't wait, I just can't. Uncle must come before Sunday."

Passing quickly down the hall, she met Mother Madeline.

"Good morning, my dear. You have a very long face for a little girl who only yesterday had such good news," said the Mother Superior, stroking the soft curls from the anxious brow.

"O Aunt Mary, may I *please* telephone to Uncle Frank?"

"Certainly, child, but will you not tell me, too, what troubles you?"

"Why, there's nothing exactly troubling me, Auntie. I just can't wait for Sunday to come, that's all."

"And you think that wonderful uncle of yours can make the world revolve more quickly, do you? asked Mother, smiling.

"Now Aunt Mary, you know I've studied joggerfy long enough not to think such a thing; but if I call him up, he may come before Sunday."

"By all means, dear, call him up. The chat will do you both good. Remember, he and I are almost as anxious to see mother and the babies as you are. He will hardly be in his office now, however, so you had better wait half an hour."

"Aunt Mary, you're a dear! I'll say the Rosary for you," cried the child, throwing her arms about Mother's neck, regardless of the clean guimpe the latter wore. Then, laughing gaily, she ran off to her practice room, little heeding Sister Edith's reproof for her tardiness.

How long the half hour seemed! At the first tinkle of the little bell which announced that practice-time was over, Mary sprang to her feet and like a flash was off to the telephone. Sister Edith hardly knew what to make of all this flurry. Had it been Wilhelmina Marvin, she could easily have understood; but what change had come over gentle little Mary Selwyn, she could not imagine. Mary herself rather enjoyed the perplexed look on Sister's face, thinking as she danced lightly away, how surprised all the Sisters would be when they heard the good news. Everyone loved the child who knew and appreciated this fact, trying as far as lay in her power to show her gratitude by refraining from all that would displease or annoy anyone.

Tom, the Doctor's office boy, answered the phone. Great was Mary's disappointment to find that her uncle was not there. Fearing that Mother Madeline would not allow her to be so extravagant as to 'phone to the city again that day, she decided to entrust her message to Tom. He was old Aunt Mandy's grandson, and his sis-

ter, Liza, was Uncle Frank's housekeeper. Both were perfectly trustworthy, and did their best to spoil Mary whenever she paid a visit to the Doctor's apartments in the city. The conversation this morning was as follows:

"How soon do you expect Uncle in, Tom?"

"Don't no'm, Miss Mayree, I sartinly don't fo' sho."

"Has he been gone long?"

"Purty consid'rable time, Miss Mayree."

"Now, Tom, I want you to tell him this for me."

"Yas'm, Miss Mayree, I sartinly will."

"Tell him, ——"

"I sartinly will, Miss Mayree."

"That I'm just dying to see him about the letter I received from him yesterday, and ——"

"Yas'm, Miss Mayree."

"And I don't see how I can possibly wait until Sunday."

"I sho'ly will, Miss Mayree."

"Is he terribly busy these days, Tom?"

"Oh, yas'm, Miss Mayree. Dis yere bell am aringin' all de time. 'Pears to me mos' all de white folks in New York mus' be sick."

"Well then, Tom, p'raps you'd better not make it too strong. I don't want Uncle to be staying up nights or anything, just on account of me."

"Bress yo' li'l heart, Miss Mayree. De Doctah am jus' as anxious to see yo' as yo' is to see him. We all is so upsot 'bout dat cable cyar what came from yo' ma dat we cain't hardly see, we sartinly is."

"Won't you and Liza be glad to see dear old Aunt Mandy again?"

"We's tickled to def, Miss Mayree at de prospec' ob such a circumstance."

"Well, if you think Uncle can't come, don't mind, Tom."

"Yo' kin bet he'll come, all right, Miss Mayree. He'll turn dis arth upside down for yo', and yo' knows it, so yo' does."

"We'll have a terrible bill for all this talk, Tom. Good-by. Tell Liza to come out soon."

"Good-by, Miss Mayree. I'll tell him for sho', I sartinly will."

With a little sigh, Mary hung up the receiver, just as the bell rang for class.

"If he can't come I'll offer it up for the holy souls and for a safe journey for mother and the twins," she thought.

Fortunately, the year's work was completed and the prizes decided, or our little girl would have had a number of black marks for inattention that day. Sister Bertrand knew her secret and made allowance for her preoccupation. She gave the class the very problem Mary was so anxious to work, and then, much to the child's delight, had a lesson in geography, in which she dwelt particularly on steamship routes across the Atlantic. After this came an hour's practice for the Closing which was to take place the following Thursday.

"Just one week more," the children told one another, over and over again. And so the day passed, as did the following, and Friday evening brought a message that Mary Selwyn was "wanted" in the parlor. The girls, who did not know her secret, wondered at the more than usual eagerness displayed by the child in obeying the summons.

Uncle Frank smiled as he heard the quick light step in the hall, and made a great show of bracing himself for the assault which he knew would follow.

"O Uncle, isn't it just too grand?" exclaimed Mary, as she sat quietly on his knee, after the embraces were over.

"Yes, little niece. Almost too good to be true, isn't it? I wonder if you can guess what came to my mind on my way out here?"

"Really, my head is in such a whirl that I hardly know the 'tootums' table, so if it's one of your hard riddles save it until I have more sense."

"It isn't a riddle at all," said the Doctor. "I was just wondering," the teasing expression coming into the merry, blue eyes,—"I was just wondering if someone's nose will be out of joint when her old uncle sits with Berta on one knee and Beth on the other."

"Aren't you a tease! You know I'll be only too glad to let them have my place even if I have to stand all the time. But what about mother's lap? Oho! I've caught you this time!"

"I thought your brains were so addled you didn't know that 'tootums one'r two.' You're an ungrateful puss to turn the tables on your poor old uncle that way."

"Now, Uncle, let's be sensified. Tell me what we are going to do?"

"We are going to wait patiently if we can—at all events we are going to wait—for that steamer to drop anchor in the river. If there is no delay, it should arrive about two o'clock Wednesday afternoon."

"And," interrupted Mary eagerly, "will two or three of those little busy-body tugs go out to meet it and tow it in, like they did the *Coronia* that day you took me to the docks to make up for how disappointed I was when I wasn't able to go to see father and mother off? After steaming so nobly across more than three thousand miles of water——"

"Hm! How well we know our geography," observed the Doctor.

"Yes, I found that out yesterday, and I know just how much nearer home mother is every day. You don't realize what a bright niece you have. Sister Bertrand gave it to us for a problem and I had the answer first in the class, because" she admitted laughingly, "I had it pretty well worked out in my mind before Sister gave it at all. But about that big ship and the tugs. I did feel sorry for the steamer when it had to be so igeroni-

minously dragged into port,'' she concluded with quite an air.

This was more than the Doctor could stand. Throwing back his head, the good man laughed long and loud. Mary at first looked a little crestfallen, then she, too, joined in the laugh and wiped away the tears that rolled down Uncle's face.

''Child dear, where *do* you hear such words? You will have to compile a dictionary of your own soon.''

''I saw *ignominious* and *erroneous* in a book today, and I guess I got them mixed up.''

''I should say you did. It's poor taste, dearie, to use words you are not sure of. Better say that the great steamer looked like a whipped dog with its tail between its legs. 'Igeroniminously' indeed!'' and the Doctor went off into another fit of laughter. ''But I must stop this teasing. You're a dear puss to stand it so well. Some girls would pout dreadfully if their old uncle twitted them so. If you only knew, little one, how I enjoy these half-hours of nonsense. We old doctors see so much suffering and misery in our daily work that we almost forget how to tease,'' said he, giving her ear a gentle tweak. He did not add that her little sayings and doings were repeated for the amusement of his patients.

''No danger of your forgetting, I fancy,'' replied Mary. ''But I don't mind, so tease away. I wouldn't be much good if I couldn't let you have a little fun after all you've done for me,'' leaning her head contentedly against the Doctor's broad shoulder.

''Hm! Been kissing the Blarney Stone lately?''

''Haven't kissed a soul but Aunt Mary since I last saw you. But do tell me what else we are going to do Wednesday. Oh!'' clasping the frail little hands, and tightly closing her eyes, ''I can see the *Helena* coming into the bay, and mother and the twinnies and old Aunt Mandy watching for us,'' she exclaimed, happy tears rolling down the excited little face. It was Uncle's

turn to get out his handkerchief and, dreading a scene, as all men do, he began at once to unfold his plans.

"What would you think of this? I shall come for you Wednesday about eleven-thirty and we shall have dinner together in town. Then we shall go down to the docks, with Liza and Tom, of course, and wait for the *Helena* to make her appearance, and then—well, I cannot answer for what any one of us may do."

"Oh, that will be just scrumptious!" cried Mary. "But you said something before about a delay. How can a steamer be delayed? There are no trains to wait for and no bridges to break down. I don't see why it can't sail straight ahead."

"So it can, usually. But if the weather is foggy, the vessel must travel slower for fear of colliding with other ships. Then there are other delays, caused by machinery getting out of order and such things. But come now, don't worry that curly pate of yours about delays. Only be ready Wednesday, so as not to keep me waiting."

Mary remained silent for a few moments. When she spoke it was in a very low tone.

"Uncle,—"

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't try to come way out here Wednesday if it's going to discon—that is," catching herself as she saw the twinkle in the Doctor's eye, "that is, if it's going to put you out any."

"Why, won't you be terribly disappointed, if I do not come? Honestly, now, won't you?" persisted the Doctor watching with interest the struggle that was going on. He thought he knew the little maid pretty well, but this last speech did surprise him.

"Aunt Mary won't see them till Thursday," replied Mary, "and it seems kind of selfish for us two to go off and have such a perfectly grand time and leave her out of it, don't you think so?"

"It would be selfish if Aunt Mary were an ordinary

person, but she is not, you know; and when she entered the Convent she gave up all notion of ever standing on a dock and cheering, as we mean to do. So don't let that worry you. It shows though, that you appreciate all that she has done for you even more than I thought."

"Indeed I do, Uncle. It's the first thing, I mean to tell mother when she comes,—all about how good and loving you have both been to me. She's heard it often and often in the letters I wrote her, but she'll hear it a million times more. I only hope she won't find me spoiled to death. *You* have certainly done your best to spoil me. Why, I told Wilhelmina the other day that I'm almost afraid to say I like a thing, because, if I do, you are sure to buy it for me. If I say I like the moon, will you ask the weather-man to have all moonlight nights?"

"Really, my dear, I fear you have had access to the tub of soft-soap. But I am pleased to hear you talk this way of Aunt Mary. There is something I have always intended to tell you about her and now is a good time to do it. You know our mother died when your mother was a little girl of ten, I a lad of fourteen, and Mary three years older. Father soon followed her. Mary and your mother had attended day-school at the Convent near home, and the former, who led her class in everything, would have graduated the following June; but after the death of our parents she remained at home. I was not surprised at this. Always self-sacrificing and generous to a fault, she did everything in her power to take the place of the loved ones we had lost. The years went on, as years will go. I was nearing the completion of my course with the Jesuits, but had not decided what my life work should be. I knew Mary's wish for me, although she had never expressed it, and I myself felt a strong attraction towards the priesthood; but there was a vague, undefined something which made me doubt whether this was God's will for me. I prayed, oh, how I prayed for 'light to know and grace to do,' and I felt that others were praying,—

Mary and the good Jesuit priest to whom I had given my confidence after father's death. At last the answer came. I had an opportunity to visit Saint ——— Hospital, one day, where the sight of so many poor sufferers had such an effect on me, that, before I left the building, my resolution was taken. No, I could not be a priest. I felt sure that God was not calling me to anything so noble, so grand. But I would be, with His help, what I deemed the next best thing to a priest or to one who teaches souls the knowledge, love, and fear of God.

"That night I acquainted Mary with my determination to study medicine, and she confided to me her intention of becoming a religious as soon as your mother and I should be settled in life and could properly care for Aunt Margaret."

"Who was Aunt Margaret, Uncle?"

"She was mother's aunt and had always made her home with us. I felt that Mary was making too great a sacrifice for us, and, much as I hated to part with her, I tried to persuade her to carry out her cherished plan at once. But she was firm in her purpose to remain with us, at least until Elizabeth had finished school, and I had to content myself with the secret resolution to study day and night until I should be a full-fledged M. D., so that I, for one, might be no obstacle in her way. Well, dearie, the time passed quickly, and about six months after your mother graduated, she married Robert Selwyn, a class-mate of mine, and the best friend I ever had." The Doctor, pausing a moment, rubbed his nose very hard with his big handkerchief; but fearing lest Mary should share in his emotion, he immediately recovered himself and continued, "They came to live in the old home, and the following summer, Aunt Margaret having died in the meantime, Mary left us for this beautiful spot where she has been ever since. The next May, God sent you, little girl, to liven things up a bit in the old place. My! what a little squealer you were."

"Now Uncle, that's not fair. How could I help squealing when I didn't know any better. Besides, mother told me I was the best of all the babies."

"Did she, indeed! Well, no doubt her memory failed her for that once. My! child, the duets of Berta and Beth were nothing compared to your solos."

"I don't believe it, and I'll ask mother first thing, so now."

"You have so much to ask mother 'first thing' that I fear she will take the return steamer for Liverpool."

'Do stop teasing and tell me the rest, please do."

"What rest? Oh yes! When you were two years old, Robert came, but God wanted him and little Frances, the next baby, in heaven; so for seven years, until the twins came, you were our one little sunbeam. You know all the rest yourself, dear. I have told you this so that you may never forget the debt of gratitude we owe to dear old Aunt Mary."

"You make me laugh when you call her and yourself 'old.' I have it all counted up and you must be only about thirty-five now. But I know of some other mighty good people in the family. Tom has told me one or two secrets 'bout an 'old' gentleman, who goes out all hours of the night in the awfullest weather to see sick folks who are too poor to pay a cent."

"What's that?" exclaimed the Doctor wrathfully, "I'll warm that darkey's ears for him if he can't hold his tongue."

"Now, now," said Mary, fishing in his pocket, "where's your thermometer? I'll wager you have a fever of one hundred and three."

"By the way, I forgot to bring your candy," said the poor man, looking quite ashamed of his carelessness.

"Candy!" repeated Mary scornfully, "Candy! Do you think I mind such trifles when mother is coming? No, indeed! But I'll tell you what you can do. Every

time you tease me, you can give me a half-pound of candy."

"And every time I catch you murdering a big word, you shall forfeit a half-pound," said Uncle laughing.

"Good!" cried Mary, "let's begin right now. No, I'm not a bit disappointed that you forgot it today. I think I'll stop eating altogether till mother gets here. I'm too excited to sit still long enough to take my meals."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, my lady! Have your mother come home and find you looking like a famine-sufferer after all the care we have tried to take of you? No, not if I have to stay to feed you!"

"Oh! you dear old goose. Don't you think I care more for you than to give mother a chance to blame you for anything?" exclaimed the child. "Why Uncle," she continued, earnestly, "there isn't a thing happens but what I tell you,—all my troubles and everything."

"I've heard very few of your troubles, so I presume you haven't many," said Uncle, smiling.

"Well, that's true. I'm not compensated——"

"Fine!" cried the Doctor, pulling her curls. "I caught you, miss."

"Fine yourself! You're teasing again. You pulled my hair."

"We will have to call it quits, then," said Uncle in a disappointed tone. "I thought I should be a half-pound ahead. Come, I must be going, and I haven't seen Aunt Mary yet. Here she is, now. Good-by, dearie. I'll let you know if I can't come Wednesday." He kissed the little girl and turned to greet Mother Madeline.

Mary danced away, leaving the brother and sister together.

"How have you been, Mary?" asked the Doctor.

"Very well, indeed. I need not ask you that question. Any news of the *Helena?*"

"Not yet. I have just been talking things over with the little one. She is almost beside herself with joy, and I promised to come for her Wednesday. The little fairy was afraid you would be lonely if we went off together, and proposed waiting until I should bring Elizabeth and the babies out here."

"Bless the child. She is far more considerate than we realize, Frank."

"Yes, and I tease her unmercifully. I must mend my ways," said the Doctor, pulling out his watch. "I'll have to run for it, Mary, or miss my train to the city."

Catching up his hat, he grasped her hand and was gone. She watched him as he strode down the walk; then, with a prayer for him and the loved sister still far away, returned to her work.

After leaving Uncle Frank, Mary ran to find Wilhelmina, and the two children again sought the quiet spot near the lake. Though Mary had nothing new to tell her little friend, she found in Wilhelmina a most interested and sympathetic listener.

"I just can't keep it to myself! It's all so grand and you're the only one of the girls I feel like telling. You don't mind leaving the games for a little while, do you?" she asked anxiously.

"Mind!" cried Wilhelmina. "Why, I'm most as excited about it all as you are. It's like something you'd read about in a fairy-book. Mind! Do hurry and tell what your uncle said."

By this time they had reached the old bench, where Mary related all the plans for the coming Wednesday.

"I told him, too, about how good your mother is to want me to visit you this summer. But oh! how can I ever wait until Wednesday," she exclaimed, clasping her hands and closing her eyes tightly to shut out the surrounding scene in order to see more clearly the one her fancy painted. "Yes," she continued as if to herself, "I see the great white ship with the big smoke

stacks, coming nearer and nearer over the bright blue water, and Uncle and me waiting, waiting, waiting, until——O Wilhelmina, I just can't wait!" she broke off suddenly.

"I really don't see how you can," answered the child by her side, "but there'll be so much going on between now and Wednesday that the time will just fly—see if it doesn't," and the black curls bobbed most emphatically. Mary shook her head, seriously doubting her little friend's words as applied to her case.

"It may fly for the rest of them who have nothing special to look forward to, but I know it'll be like centuries to me. Oh, there's that bell! Seems to me a bell always rings when we have lots to talk about. Gracious!" with a glance at the sun, "it must be supper time. Where *has* the afternoon gone!"

"Hm," observed Wilhelmina, with a roguish twinkle in her dark eyes. "I thought time wouldn't fly for some folks. Catch me if you can!" and the child was off like a flash, closely followed by Mary, anxious to repay her for that last shot.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF THE NEWFOUNDLAND BANKS.

"How long before we leave this dreadful fog behind us, Captain?"

The speaker was a tall, dark woman, one of a group of four, who occupied a sheltered corner on the deck of the ocean-steamer, *Helena.* The Captain paused in his promenade, and, before answering, drew up a deck-chair and joined the circle.

"Here's a place for you, little lady," he said, patting his knee and holding out his hand to a dark-eyed child, clad in a Red Riding-hood cloak, leaning against a fair young woman, who held on her lap a pale, delicate-looking little girl of scarce three years. The child addressed hesitated to leave her mother, but on second thought ran to the Captain.

"Oh yes, we have become great friends, this little girl and I, Mrs. Selwyn. I am afraid I shall be a lonely old man on my next trip across," declared Captain Crosby tweaking the tiny ear, invisible because of the mass of dark curls which covered it.

"Berta will miss her good friend, too," replied Mrs. Selwyn. "I wish Beth would run about more. She is entirely too timid."

"Never mind," laughed the Captain, "Berta has 'go' enough in her for both. Of course, it would be better for the little one to run around and get strong."

"You say 'little one,' Captain. The children are twins."

"You don't mean it!" he exclaimed. "Berta looks so much older."

The lady who had first addressed the Captain watched silently and with jealous eyes the child who sat con-

tentedly on his knee playing with his great gold watch-chain. Since the first day out, she had vainly striven to win the little girl's confidence, but the child firmly resisted her overtures and politely rejected the proffered sweets. Mrs. Bruce had no intention of giving up, however, and determined to use all her arts to win over her small antagonist. Only two days lay between them and New York, and all on board were glad that the long voyage from Liverpool was nearly ended. Very early that morning the great ship had entered the dense fog which hangs over the Newfoundland Banks, the passengers being made fully aware of the fact by the deafening blasts of the fog horn.

"You asked how soon we may hope to leave this old enemy of ours behind, Mrs. Bruce. If nothing unforseen happens, I can promise you fair skies tomorrow. I assure you I shall be just as glad as you will be to see them again."

"I should think you would be so accustomed to these fogs that you would not mind them," remarked the lady.

"Does one ever really become accustomed to a thing so dangerous to navigation as these fogs?" asked the Captain gravely. "Since half-past one this morning I have stood on the bridge awaiting the report of the look-out; for when he gives the warning, ladies, we must act quickly."

"Are we really in danger, Captain?" asked Mrs. Selwyn in a surprised tone.

"No ship can pass over the 'Graveyard of the Atlantic' without being in more or less danger. But the worst is over, else I should not be down here. See yonder, how the fog is lifting. Yes, if the wind does not change, I am confident of a bright day tomorrow. What do you say, Miss Berta, to a stroll around deck?" He rose and swung the child lightly to his shoulder. "There is room on the other one for you, Beth. Won't you come?"

"Tum on Bef, it's lot of fun 'way up here. Tap'n is goin' to take me widing."

But Beth only clung closer to her mother, hiding her face on that friendly shoulder. The Captain shook his head laughingly, and strode away down the deck with the little red-cloaked figure on his shoulder.

"What's zat yitty fing way up zer?" asked the child, as they passed around the front of the vessel.

"What little thing? Oh, that's the crow's nest."

"What zat?"

"The place where two men stay to watch for other ships so that we won't run into them. Want to go up there?"

"Ess. Oh, I wish my yitty sissoo tould tum, and muzzer, too; but not zat ozzer lady."

"What's the matter with the other lady?"

"I is 'faid of her eyes, I is."

"Why, she seems very fond of you."

"What zat?"

"What?"

"Fond of 'oo."

"Oh," laughed the Captain, "she likes you very much. But come now if you want to go up to the crow's nest."

"Will a big black trow be in it?"

"Two of them, but not exactly the kind you mean."

The Captain proceeded to make his way down through the vessel to the door-way which opens into the foot of the great mast through which they ascended to the crow's nest.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Selwyn and Mrs. Bruce had resumed their conversation, the first one of any length which had taken place between them.

"Like the Captain, I can hardly believe your little girls are twins. Berta looks more than a year older

than this child, and they do not resemble each other in the least. You do not dress them alike either."

"Berta has always been so much stronger than Beth, consequently more self-reliant. She is very like her father, and this little one, they say, resembles me. She is dedicated to our Blessed Mother and will wear blue and white until she is seven, while Berta wears red in honor of the Sacred Heart."

"I fear I do not understand you. I am not a Catholic, Mrs. Selwyn. Nevertheless, this pale blue cloak and hood are very becoming to Beth, and the red to Berta. By the way, is that name a form of 'Bertha'?"

"No, Mrs. Bruce, my little one is called Roberta, after her father, Robert Selwyn."

"You have no other children?"

"One more, a little girl of ten, who is with my brother and sister in New York."

"Do your husband's relatives also live in New York?"

"No, Mrs. Bruce. My husband had but one brother and sister. The latter remained with her father on their old Virginia plantation until his death eleven years ago, when she joined her brother abroad. Since that time we have never heard of either of them."

"It is strange, is it not, how members of a family drift apart? Doubtless your husband and little girl will be at the docks to meet you, Mrs. Selwyn. How fortunate you are, how very fortunate you are! My home-coming is sad indeed. I have no children, and my husband died in England a year ago, so that I am all alone."

"I can really sympathize with you Mrs. Bruce, as I, too, am returning home a widow," responded Mrs. Selwyn, her eyes filling with tears as she thought of a lonely grave in far-off Italy. She did not notice the start of surprise nor the look of pain which swept over her companion's countenance.

"Don't cwy, muzzer, don't cwy," pleaded Beth, kiss-

ing away the tears, while Mrs. Selwyn hugged the little one closer, stroking the soft fair curls that peeped out from the blue hood.

"You are not cold, darling, are you?" she asked.

"No, muzzer, I is all nice and comfy." ,

"Was Ro— Mr. Selwyn traveling for his health?" pursued Mrs. Bruce.

"No, Mrs. Bruce, he was obliged by business to live in Rome for a year, at the end of which time we intended to return home; but the doctor feared the extreme change in autumn, from Italy to New York, for Beth, so we decided to remain until spring. Just after Christmas, a party of Americans, friends of Mr. Selwyn, persuaded him to accompany them on a trip to India, intending to return about the end of May. They went quite a distance up into the country, and on their homeward journey camped for a week not far from Calcutta. Mr. Selwyn sent Tom, his colored servant, into the city to engage passage on the next steamer leaving for Europe, and in that way spent a night alone in his tent. The following morning, when he did not appear at breakfast, his friends went to his tent and found it empty, but, as the bed had been occupied during the night, they concluded that he had gone for a stroll and would soon return. When an hour elapsed and he did not come, they started out in search of him, and after some time came upon him lying on the ground, dead from the bites of venomous snakes whose nest he must have accidentally disturbed." Mrs. Selwyn covered her face with her hands, her slight frame shaken with the emotion she could no longer repress, while Mrs. Bruce, too, showed unwonted feeling, and Beth looked in dismay from one to the other, then about the deck as if seeking some remedy for this sad state of affairs.

"Here tum Berta and the Cap'n. Zey's wunnin' a wace," she exclaimed, springing from her mother's knee, and running to meet her sister, who put her arm around the little blue figure with the most protecting

air possible. Every eye watched the tiny pair as they trotted along the deck beside the Captain. There was, indeed, a great contrast between the two beautiful children,—Berta, sturdy and rosy, her great brown eyes sparkling with fun and mischief, her dark rebellious curls, which defied all Aunt Mandy's efforts to keep them neat, bobbing saucily from out the scarlet hood; Beth, fragile and fair as a dainty flower, her eyes deep and blue, with that wondering expression so often noticed in little children.

"I have brought your little one back, safe and sound, Mrs. Selwyn," said the Captain with a salute which Berta attempted to imitate, to the great amusement of the other passengers. "She is a fine sailor, and I hope to have the pleasure of her company on another voyage some day."

"Oh muzzer, Tap'n did take me way, way up to ze trow's nest, and it isn't nenny nest at all. It's like a yitty porch wif two men in it, and zey's all ze time lookin' fru a long fing for ice-burgles, zey is. What's ice-burgles, muzzer?"

"Big mountains of ice, dear. Don't you remember the mountains we used to see, away in the distance? Well, something like that, only made of cold, shiny ice."

"O Tap'n, I wis' we tould see one!"

"Well then, I don't. But I must be off. It is nearly time to dress for dinner. Here's Aunt Mandy after you," and with a bow to the little group, the Captain strode away.

"Yes, Aunt Mandy, we are ready to go in now," said Mrs. Selwyn to the old colored woman who stood at a respectful distance waiting for the Captain to withdraw. She now gathered up wraps and cushions and followed the ladies who with the children were on their way down the deck. Arriving at the stateroom, the nurse with loving care removed the warm cloaks and proceeded to dress her charges for dinner. The simple, white dresses of fine, soft material, exactly alike save

for the pale blue ribbons on one and the cherry-colored on the other, gave evidence of the mother's good taste and set off the beauty of her little ones. Her own black gown, simple yet elegant, was in striking contrast to the elaborate dinner costumes of most of the ladies.

With a tiny hand in each of hers, she led the little girls to the dining-room. On the way thither they again met Mrs. Bruce who tried to take Berta's disengaged hand, but the child drew back so suddenly and clung so tightly with both hands to her mother's, that the latter looked down at her in surprise.

"Why, what is the matter, dear? Won't you take Mrs. Bruce's hand?" But Berta only clung the more, shaking her dark curls most emphatically.

"She is not usually so timid, Mrs. Bruce, but we have lived very quietly for the past two years so that the children have met few strangers."

The lights in the passage-way were somewhat dim, and Mrs. Selwyn did not notice the expression on the face of the older woman. Far better for her had she seen the gleam of jealousy in the dark eyes fixed on her darling during that dinner-hour, and heard the words, "Robert Selwyn's child, *and he is dead.* She has two others, while I am utterly alone. Not even one of the old servants left to bid me welcome home. O Robert Selwyn, why did you!"

But Mrs. Selwyn suspected nothing. She was one of a cheery group who sat at the Captain's table, the Captain at the head, Berta at his left, Mrs. Selwyn next, then little Beth, and so on around the party of New Yorkers who had become great friends on this long homeward voyage. All had proved themselves excellent sailors, able to enjoy three good meals a day, and Captain Crosby, never in want of a topic of conversation, did more than his share towards keeping the party in good spirits. So attentive was he to his little friend on his left, that she could not refrain from leaning over her mother to tell Beth in a whisper that was heard all

around the table, "Tap'n Twosby treats me des like I is a yun lady. 'Oo tan sit here for breksas, don't 'oo want to?" But timid Beth shook her yellow curls and declined the honor.

Dinner over, they repaired to the drawing-room, with the exception of a few of the gentlemen who were willing to brave the fog and dampness for the sake of a smoke on deck. After an hour spent in music and song, Mrs. Selwyn excused herself on the plea that it was bedtime for her little daughters. She found Aunt Mandy waiting in the stateroom, and while the faithful old nurse put the children to bed, she sat down to write a long letter to Father Giovanni, her good friend and counselor of the past two years. The little ones came to say their prayers at her knee, and after kissing them and seeing that they were well tucked in bed, she bade the old servant good-night and dismissed her until morning, thinking as she resumed her seat, "Dear Aunt Mandy, what should I ever have done without her." With a sigh, she again began to write; a whole hour passed before she had sealed and stamped the letter which Father Giovanni was never to receive. Then removing her rich gown, she wrapped a warm dressing robe about her and knelt beside her sleeping children to say her Rosary. Her prayers finished, she still knelt, how long she never knew, gazing on the flushed little faces before her. She heard the "All's well" of the watch in the crow's nest and the answering cry from the bridge. Slowly her mind traveled over the joys and sorrows of the years spent in Italy; then on to the reunion two days hence; and her tears overflowed at the thought of how different it all might have been. At length, reproaching herself for her want of gratitude to God for the loved ones still left to her, she slipped her rosary around her neck, and removed from her fingers two valuable rings. These she put carefully in a small chamois bag which she wore attached to a chain about her neck. It already contained jewels of great worth, some of which had belonged to her mother, while

others were the gifts of her husband. Her money she carried in a close-fitting belt worn under her dress. She was in the act of rising to her feet, bending over as she did so to kiss once more the rosy little faces, when a terrific crash threw her headlong against the wall opposite. The great ship quivered in every fiber, then stood still, and a silence as of death ensued. Then came the rush of feet in the corridors and on the deck overhead. Snatching up a pair of warm slippers, she thrust them on Berta's feet, thankful that Aunt Mandy had insisted on having the little ones sleep in their slumber-robes. She woke the child and hastily fastened the red cloak about her, drawing the hood well over the curly head.

"Stand still, darling, till mother gets little sister ready. Don't go to sleep again. Captain wants us all up on deck, dear," and, while striving to rouse Berta to full consciousness, she wrapped Beth in a heavy blanket, threw a large shawl about her own head and shoulders, and unfastened the door. With the sleeping child on one arm and Berta's chubby hand clasped tightly in hers, she hurried through the now deserted passages, earnestly wishing that Aunt Mandy would come to her aid; for Berta was only half awake and, though the poor child stumbled bravely along the dimly-lighted hall-ways, their progress was necessarily slow.

"Does 'oo fink Tap'n is going to have s'y-rockets, muzzer?"

"Maybe so, darling," but the mother's heart sank as she thought to what use the rockets were to be put. At last they reached the top of the first flight of stairs, and Mrs. Selwyn uttered a fervent "thank God," as she saw Mrs. Bruce hastening to meet her. The latter tried to take Berta in her arms, but the child, wide awake now, resisted.

"Go to Mrs. Bruce for mother's sake, dear," and the little thing obeyed at once, though the big dark eyes were wide with fear.

"We must go up to the boat deck," said Mrs. Bruce. "Turn down this way. There is a door farther down that will bring us out among the second-class passengers. All the first-class have been lowered in the boats at the forward end of the deck, so our best chance now is down near the middle. The Captain says the ship will float for hours. Struck by a submerged ice-field. Three vessels signalled by means of the *wireless* are rushing to the rescue. There is no danger. The sea is calm. If this awful fog would only lift!"

"Have you seen Aunt Mandy? It is not like her to leave me alone in this way."

"I have not seen her."

By this time they had reached the boat-deck and found the number of boats rapidly diminishing.

Meanwhile, Aunt Mandy had made her way to Mrs. Selwyn's stateroom, and, finding her gone, she seized an armful of blankets and hastened out to the forward part of the deck where the last of the first-class passengers were being lowered in a boat. Running up to an officer who was directing the proceedings she cried, "O sah! whar's ma Miss 'Lisbuf? Ma Miss 'Lisbuf an' dem precious lambs?"

"Were they first-class passengers?" asked the officer.

"Yas sah, dey wuz."

"All the first-class passengers are out there," pointing to the lanterns that could be dimly seen bobbing about in the darkness. "The Captain sent around to all the staterooms, and there's not a soul in one of them. Here's a place for you in this boat, and you'll be with your mistress in a few hours when the other vessel picks us up," continued the officer, kindly.

Poor Aunt Mandy, thinking that Mrs. Selwyn and the children were safe, allowed herself to be assisted into the boat and lowered away. She clung to her big, green cotton umbrella, the only one of her few possesions

she had brought from the wreck, and even in this instance the safety and comfort of her "Miss Lisbuf an' dem bressed lambs" were her first thought.

"Fo' yo' see," she remarked confidentially to her neighbor in the boat, "dis heah am a powahful useful ting fo' keepin' de waveses from dashin' ober a pusson." Had she known what was happening farther down on the deck, her faithful heart would have been far from peaceful. There Mrs. Selwyn and Mrs. Bruce stood among the second-class passengers, anxiously awaiting their turns.

"How can I ever thank you for coming to my assistance, Mrs. Bruce!" exclaimed Mrs. Selwyn. "I dread to think of what might have happened had I been left alone with the children," but her voice was drowned in the noise and confusion which prevailed in spite of the presiding officer's oft-repeated declaration that there was no immediate danger, and boats enough for all on board.

Mrs. Bruce, grasping Mrs. Selwyn by the arm, forced her way through the throng to the officer's side and in a low tone informed him that they were first-class passengers, delayed on account of the children from joining the others of their cabin. The officer immediately assisted Mrs. Selwyn into the boat before them. In the effort to keep her balance, burdened as she was with Beth still asleep in her arms, she did not notice that there was only one vacant seat and that the officer had given the command to lower away. Placing Beth in the out-stretched hands of a good-natured Irish woman, she was about to take Berta from Mrs. Bruce, when she was startled by the piteous scream, "Muzzer! Muzzer! take me too!" Turning, she stretched out her arms and a cry burst from her lips as she saw the ever-widening space between herself and the little red-cloaked figure far above her on the railing.

"Jump, darling, jump! Mother will catch you!" she cried, heedless of the danger and conscious only of the

gleam of malignant triumph in the eyes of the woman who was keeping her child from her.

The little one heard the call in spite of the surrounding din and struggled frantically to obey; but the strong arm about her held firm, and, leaning far over the rail, the dark-eyed woman hissed, "You took my brother from me. I will keep your child!"

"Bertha Selwyn!" gasped the mother. She swayed and would have fallen but for the officer in the boat, who seized her arm, exclaiming, "I must insist that you take your seat, Madam. You are endangering not only your own life but the lives of all in the boat."

"But my child, sir, my child!"

"I am very sorry, Madam, but it is impossible to go back now. She will be sent down in the next boat, and when we are all afloat I shall do all in my power to have her transferred to this one."

With a moan, the poor mother sank to the seat. Only two persons had witnessed the scene, which lasted but a moment. The officer and the sailors were too busy attending to the boat, and the passengers too engrossed with their own comfort and safety to pay any attention to what was going on around them. The warm-hearted Irish-woman, who strove in her own simple way to comfort the stricken mother, was one of the witnesses; a little cabin boy, hidden under a pile of ropes in the bow of the boat, was the other. Never, to their dying moment, would either of them forget that picture. The agonized mother, the terrified little child, and the dark handsome face of the woman on the deck, whose voice rang in their ears for many and many a day.

"The name is Bruce," murmured Mrs. Selwyn, vainly straining her eyes for a glimpse of the bright red cloak, which, when those terrible words were utterd, had disappeared from the railing. Over and over she repeated, "*Bruce* is the name, *Bruce* is the name," until the motherly woman at her side drew her close, whispering, "Don't worry your pretty head about it,

darlint. I'll remember it for ye. Why, 'tis that aisy I know it by heart, already. Rest your head here on my shoulder, that's a good child. No, ye'd better let me kape this little one. Sure, she's as loight as a feather, and ye'll be needin' both yer arms to mother the other darlint in a few minutes." She wrapped the shawl about the frail shivering figure.

By this time the boat had reached the water, the ropes were cast off, and with a few strong pulls the sailors soon put fifty yards between them and the ship.

"Not too far, boys," cautioned the officer. "The Captain's orders are to keep as near as possible to the other boats so as to avoid being run down in this fog."

The sailors rested on their oars, and all eyes were fixed on the one bright spot they had left behind. Every deck and porthole was ablaze with light, and the great white vessel stood out plainly against the dark sky; but heavy masses of fog rolled between her and the anxious watchers in the boats, making it impossible to distinguish anything. Occasionally, through a rift in the fog, a boat could be seen slowly descending, but it was useless to try to discern its occupants. The officer hailed one which, judging by its lantern, was approaching them.

"Have you a child aboard?" he shouted; and through the fog came back the muffled answer, "No, sir."

A shudder passed through her slender frame as Mrs. Selwyn realized, with sinking heart, the difficulty there would be in recovering her lost darling in that darkness. Mrs. O'Malley whispered reassuringly, "Kape up yer heart, alanna; 'twill be but a little time now until the other ships come, and then ye'll have the beautiful baby again."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bruce, or rather Mrs. Ashmere as we shall henceforth know her, had made her way through the crowd to a point far down the deck, determined to put as great a distance as possible between herself and her sister-in-law. The struggling, screaming child in

her arms rendered calm thinking impossible, and as yet her schemes for keeping Berta in her possession were extremely vague. Before embarking at Liverpool, she had seen Mrs. Selwyn's name on the list of passengers, and, fearing to be recognized, had at the last moment presented to the steamship authorities a letter stating that Mrs. Ashmere, on account of illness, would be unable to sail on the out-going steamer, but that her friend, Mrs. Bruce, had purchased her ticket from her. Never having met her brother's wife, she felt quite sure that by changing her name she could avoid recognition. She might, however, have spared herself all anxiety; for Mrs. Selwyn had never heard of her marriage to Herbert Ashmere, and knew her sister-in-law only as Bertha Selwyn, who bitterly blamed her brother's wife for his conversion to the Catholic faith. Therefore, when she made herself known in the manner above described, the intelligence fell like a thunder-bolt on the unsuspecting young mother. But what was it to Bertha Ashmere that another suffered if she but gained her own selfish ends. With a threat of future punishment to the terrified baby, she at length succeeded in obtaining a place in a boat far down the deck.

As the last of the life-boats reached the water, a loud cheer from the sailors who manned her announced to the neighboring boats that, with the exception of the Captain and the first mate, not a human being remained on the great steamer. The two mentioned stood on the bridge ready with rockets to signal the expected rescuing vessels. Boat after boat took up the cheer, which was suddenly drowned by a deafening crash. Instantly the ship was in darkness, and, rolling heavily over on her side, began to sink rapidly. The roar of the water, as it poured into the terrible rent made by the floating ice, struck terror into the hearts of the bravest.

"Pull for your lives!" shouted the officers. "She's sinking fast and will draw us all down with her!"

The sailors bent to their oars and the boats leaped

forward over the black waters until the officers thought a sufficient distance had been covered, when all sat in silence awaiting the end. A tiny light, shed by an oil-lamp high up in the main-mast, indicated by its rapid descent just how fast the vessel was sinking. It stood still for a moment, wavered, then disappeared, as with a final plunge the proud *Helena* sank to the bottom.

A deathlike silence fell over the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." Every soul in the boats thought of "what might have been," and many a prayer of fervent gratitude winged its way to the great white throne.

"God be merciful to the poor Captain and the one that was with him!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Malley.

"AMEN!" came from every one in the boat, for though few were Catholics, the simple prayer of the warm-hearted woman was echoed by all.

"Do you think they had any chance, sir?" asked one of the sailors in a low tone.

"Hardly, unless they were thrown overboard when she first keeled over and were picked up by one of the boats on the other side. If they waited to make their escape when she sank, they would have been drawn down with her."

While the officer spoke, an anxious expression crept over his face, for, look where he would, not a glimmer of light could he see. What had become of the other boats? Where were their lights which had been at least dimly visible through the fog. Had they, in their attempts to put a safe distance between themselves and the sinking *Helena*, pulled so far away that their lanterns were no longer to be seen? Or had the fog simply become more dense? These were the questions that now perplexed him. The answer to the last could be easily ascertained. Making a trumpet of his hands, he hallooed in every direction, but silence was the only answer. Fearing to become even more separated from their companions, all agreed that it would be safer to remain where they were and trust to searchlights of the coming steam-

ers. There was no danger that they would come and go without making a thorough search for every boat, and, as all were numbered, any one of them would be quickly missed. It was two o'clock and another hour ought to bring the rescuers. In the dim light of the lantern, Mrs. Selwyn saw Beth's wondering eyes fixed on her. Well might the poor child look frightened, for never before had she seen her mother's face so drawn and haggard. The broken-hearted woman took the little one into her arms and strove to reassure her, but the kisses were mingled with a shower of burning tears and the child was more bewildered than before. She was cold, oh! so cold, and her clothing was wet through by the water which had dashed over the sides of the boat in the rapid pull from the sinking ship. Mrs. Selwyn noticed it at once, but, beyond wrapping her own shawl closely about the shivering little form, she was powerless. The child strove to speak but her voice was hoarse, and the hard little cough that shook the frail frame caused the anxious lines in the mother's face to deepen.

"Where we is, muzzer?"

"In a little boat darling, but try not to talk. It will make your throat sore."

"It do hurt now, way, way down."

"I'm so sorry, dear. Go to sleep again and mother will try to get you into a nice warm bed soon." Then as the little thing dozed off, the poor mother's tears flowed afresh, the pallid lips murmuring over and over, "My little lost child, my little lost child."

The officer, seeing the little girl in her arms, thought that this was the child she had pleaded for when the boat was being lowered. He was busy at the ropes at the time, and as all the ladies carried as many of their possessions as they could gather in a shawl, he had not noticed that Mrs. Selwyn's burden differed from theirs. So he very naturally thought that some friend, or the nurse perhaps, had brought the child into the boat while the mother was looking for her on deck.

The moments dragged on, and Mrs. Selwyn's thoughts travelled back over the days which had elapsed since the *Helena* left Liverpool. Bitterly she reproached herself for her short-sightedness. It was all so clear now; the efforts of her sister-in-law to win Berta's affection, her inquiries about the other members of the family, her interest in the account of Mr. Selwyn's death, her return at the risk of her own life to prevent Mrs. Selwyn from going to the forward end of the deck where she would be recognized and assisted, and where old Aunt Mandy was probably waiting for her. Why had not Berta's instinctive dislike for the woman put her on her guard? The child had never behaved in that manner before. But what would the woman have done had there been no wreck? Was Berta's abduction part of a well-planned scheme, or had the aunt merely seized the opportunity which presented itself? And how did she expect to carry out her threat, for once on board the rescuing steamer she could have no reasonable hope of concealing the child from the anxious mother. In spite of this reassuring thought, Mrs. Selwyn's heart was heavy with forebodings, and her memory carried her back to her wedding journey, when Robert took her to his old Virginia home. How proud and happy he was as they drove up the long avenue from the gates, and he pointed out to her the many haunts of his boyhood. How her heart ached for him when they reached the house where there was no one to bid them welcome, —no one but old black Ephraim, whom Robert had befriended in bygone days, and who had braved the anger of the master, and possible dismissal, rather than be disloyal to "young Massa." The old servant told them how Bertha had poisoned the aged father's mind against the elder brother because of his conversion to the Catholic faith and his marriage to a Catholic, and how she had insisted on his absenting himself from the old home until her brother's visit should be over. Ah yes, Bertha Selwyn's hatred was deep and bitter, and Mrs. Selwyn shuddered to think of her darling in the power of such

a woman. She pictured the piteous distress of the little one through all these dark, cold hours, and with clasped hands and bowed head she clung to the child in her arms while her bursting heart sent forth the prayer, "Mother of Sorrows and Mercy! by thy cruel agony at the loss of thy divine Son, restore to me my child." Over and over she repeated the words, her beads slipping through her fingers, until at length, soothed by the rocking of the boat and overcome by exhaustion, her head fell against Mrs. O'Malley's shoulder and she slept. An hour passed. The cold was piercing. Mrs. O'Malley wrapped part of her own shawl about the sleeping mother and child. The officer strove hard to conceal his anxiety and with the sailors kept a sharp lookout on all sides. Where were the boats? Was it possible that they had been drawn down by the *Helena* at that last awful moment? It could not be. Most of them were at the time farther from the ship than his boat. Another hour. Not a gleam of light, not a sound. Would the steamers never come?

CHAPTER V.

RESCUE.

And what *had* become of the other boats?

Unlike *Number 16,* they had no trouble in keeping together, and when an hour or so after the *Helena* went down, lights were dimly seen both to the east and to the west of them, great indeed was the rejoicing. A large steamer bound for New York, and another which had just left that port, appeared simultaneously on the scene; they were soon joined by a third, eastward bound. The great search-lights played on the crowded life-boats, and after ascertaining the number of persons they contained, the pursers on two of the ships declared that between them they could accommodate all the shipwrecked. When it was discovered that *Number 16* was missing, it was decided that the third steamer should remain in the locality of the wreck to make a thorough search, even should it require part of the next day to accomplish it.

Bertha Ashmere well knew the number of the boat which held Mrs. Selwyn and Beth, and, hearing of its disappearance, her one care was to avoid a meeting with Aunt Mandy. If she could but reach a stateroom before she was discovered, all would be well. Fortunately Berta had sobbed herself to sleep, and wrapped as she was in blankets and shawls, one might easily mistake her for a bundle of either. Being among the first taken on board, Mrs. Ashmere hurried to the stateroom allotted her.

Hardly had she disappeared from the deck than poor Aunt Mandy, her old black face ashen with fear and anxiety, made her way to the purser exclaiming, "Oh sah! *whar* is ma Miss 'Lisbuf an' dem beautiful babies?"

"Miss Elizabeth?" questioned the purser.

"Yas sah, Mrs. Selwyn an' her chillun. Hab dey come up heah, yet? She'll need me powahful bad to help git dem bressed lambs to bed. I'se her nu'se, I is. Ben in de fambly sixty-foah yeahs, I sartinly has."

"Mrs. Selwyn's name is not here, my good woman," said the officer consulting a list he held, "but all of the passengers are not yet aboard, and if she does not come on with them, she is probably on the other ship. Wait here and see for yourself, and in a few moments I will make inquiries of the purser on the other vessel."

The faithful old darkey stood scanning each face and questioning those passengers who had known Mrs. Selwyn; but all in vain. When the purser finally told her that her mistress must be in the missing boat, her grief was pitiful to see. It was useless to assure her that the third steamer would find *Number Sixteen.* She begged to be put on that steamer so as to be where she could take care of her charges when they were found. When told this could not be, she demanded to be put off again in one of the life-boats that she might search for herself.

"Marse Frank done tol' me, 'Tek good care of Miss 'Lisbuf an' dem babies, Aunt Mandy'; an' I sho' hab teken de bestest care I knowed how, an' does yo' think I kin go back an' face him an Miss Mayree wifout dem? No, *sah!* Oh, why foah de good Lawd didn't tek dis poah ole niggah an' spare dem beautiful lambs!" cried the poor soul sinking into a chair and rocking back and forth in overwhelming grief.

Down in the stateroom another scene was taking place. Berta had wakened, feverish and excited, but when Mrs. Ashmere approached the bed, the child buried her face in the pillows, screaming for her mother. The stewardess came in with a tray; for Mrs. Ashmere, determined not to risk discovery by leaving the stateroom, had ordered the meals served there. Placing the tray on a small table, the kind-hearted woman bent over the child, who clung to her crying piteously.

"She is my niece," said Mrs. Ashmere, "and her mother is dead. I am taking her to my home, but I fear I shall have trouble with her."

"Muzzer is in ze yitty boat, muzzer and yitty sissoo. Oh! take me to muzzer and old mammy and Bef," sobbed the poor baby on the shoulder of the woman who held her close.

"She saw someone who resembled her mother in one of the boats," nervously remarked Mrs. Ashmere, "I wish we could get her to eat something."

"The child is ill," replied the stewardess. "I shall ask the doctor to step in as soon as he can. She has a high fever and all this excitement is bad for her. Come, dear," she said soothingly to Berta, "let me put you to bed. You must have a good sleep and then you will feel better."

"Will muzzer tum zen?" asked the child.

"I don't know, but Auntie will stay with you, so you musn't be afraid," replied the stewardess.

"Who is Auntie?"

"Why, I am, darling," exclaimed Mrs. Ashmere, drawing near. "I am your Aunt Bertha."

"No, no, no! 'oo isn't my auntie," cried the child, clinging tightly to the stewardess. "Go way, go way! I is af'aid of 'oo. Muzzer neber told me 'oo was my auntie. 'Oo is Mrs. Beuce, 'oo is. 'Oo held me tight so I touldn't go to muzzer. Oh," appealingly to the stewardess, " 'Oo will find muzzer for me, won't 'oo? I love 'oo, and I want 'oo to stay wif me till muzzer tums. But make her go way," waving her chubby hand towards Mrs. Ashmere.

"The child must be delirious," declared Mrs. Ashmere, fearing lest the stewardess should repeat anything she heard. "She is my brother's little girl, and her parents and little sister died in England a short time ago. She was deeply attached to them, and, as I have been on the Continent for some years, she never knew

me. She has been so docile and contented up to this, that I do not know what to make of her now."

"I shall stay here until she goes to sleep, and perhaps when she feels better she may take kindly to you again," answered the stewardess, at the same time ringing an electric bell near her. It was promptly answered and she sent a message to the doctor requesting his presence at once. After some little delay, he came. Berta had fallen into a restless sleep, crying out occasionally for her mother. The doctor ordered that certain remedies be given her, and left the room remarking that the night's experience was sufficient to upset the nerves of anyone.

The stewardess at last prevailed on Mrs. Ashmere to take some rest, promising to look in occasionally to give Berta her medicine. The day passed uneventfully. The sick child tossed restlessly, refusing to take anything except from the stewardess whose every free moment Mrs. Ashmere engaged and liberally paid for. By remaining in the stateroom, the latter avoided all risks of recognition by those whom she had known on the *Helena.* She had heard no report of the missing boat. If its inmates had been rescued by any steamer equipped with the Marconi System, she knew that all her schemes were useless, for Mrs. Selwyn would most assuredly notify Doctor Carlton who would send detectives out with the pilot from Sandy Hook. Clearly, in that case, there would be no chance of concealment. She would be obliged to give up the child, pretending that she had retained her only for the little one's safety. But what of the cruel words she had uttered? Well, she could doubtless make her escape before being brought face to face with Elizabeth Selwyn. However, she had little fear that *Number 16* had been found. Why was it not with the other boats if it had not been drawn down with the sinking *Helena?* Dismissing the detective idea from her mind, she gave her attention to the more certain dangers which awaited her; namely, the arrival at the dock, and the Custom House officials. True, she had

no baggage, not even a hand satchel, for inspection. Her trunks, containing costly laces and rare treasures, picked up in her wanderings about Europe, were all safe enough at the bottom of the Atlantic. Gladly would she give them all for the love of Robert's beautiful child lying asleep before her. And then, between her and the flushed face on the pillow, there rose another, pale, haggard, upturned to her own. With a cry, she covered her eyes to shut out the sight.

"What!" she exclaimed, "will you haunt me now? Hasn't my life been miserable enough on your account? You took from me the only being on earth I really loved. The child would have been drowned anyway if I had let her jump. No, no! it is all imagination. My nerves are unstrung," and she set herself resolutely to the consideration of her plans. The only real danger that she had to fear in the Custom House was the delay, and she felt sure that she could prevail on the officials to allow her to proceed on her way. She fully realized that she ran her greatest risk when leaving the steamer. There was no possibility of her being recognized by Dr. Carlton whom she had not met for years, but how was she to avoid the friends she had made on board the *Helena,* all of whom knew Berta? Above all, how elude Aunt Mandy? She knew the faithful old darkey was on the same ship with her; for, while Berta slept, the stewardess had given a detailed description of her grief at the loss of Mrs. Selwyn and the children. Doubtless everyone by this time had heard the story. Then came the thought,—"How many of the first-class passengers are aboard this steamer? Perhaps none who know me." By dint of cautious inquiries she ascertained that her friends had been picked up by the other vessel. Quickly, then, she made her plans. By taking her place early on deck, near the railing, she could avoid mixing with the crowd and be one of the first to leave the vessel. She felt sure that Aunt Mandy would linger after the others in hope of hearing some news of the missing ones. The old servant would certainly be in no hurry to meet the

Doctor. There was still one more problem. Would Berta submit quietly to being carried off the steamer? If she happened to be asleep, all would be well. If not, Mrs. Ashmere felt sure there would be a scene, for the child still showed the greatest aversion for her and whenever she came near cried loudly for her mother. Without question, then, Berta must be asleep when the vessel docked. To secure this end, Mrs. Ashmere, complaining of need of rest, obtained from the doctor some sleeping powders. She had not the least idea how much of one of these she could safely give so young a child, and dared not ask advice for fear of arousing suspicion. Having learned that the vessel, though the slower of the two rescuing steamers, would, nevertheless, reach New York the following morning, Wednesday, about ten o'clock, some hours earlier than the *Helena* had been expected there, she thought by administering the powder at eight in the morning, she could safely count on Berta's being in a heavy sleep when they arrived at the docks. Then, wrapping her well in blankets and concealing her beneath the large shawl she herself intended to wear, she hoped to escape unnoticed. Looking at her watch, she saw that it was only six o'clock. Another long night before her. The stewardess entered with the supper tray, but Mrs. Ashmere sent it away almost untouched, announcing her intention of retiring early. Generously rewarding the woman for her kindness, she told her that, with the exception of bringing the breakfast, her services would be no longer required. She well knew that the fewer people she had about her in the morning, the better it would be for her ends.

The night dragged on. She heard the bells which rang the hours and half-hours, and several times caught the faint "All's well" of the lookout far up on the mast, shuddering as she remembered all that had followed the last "All's well" of the preceding night. The air in the cabin seemed suffocating, and wrapping a heavy shawl about her, she made her way to the deck. It was a glorious night. The sky was studded with stars, but

to her they seemed like so many accusing eyes. As she neared the end of the deck she became aware that she was not alone, and started as she recognized the bowed form of Aunt Mandy leaning against the railing. By the light of a neighboring electric lamp she could see the haggard face, the lips moving in prayer as the well-worn beads slipped through the withered fingers, and the tearful eyes straining to see through the darkness the lights of the ship which she fondly hoped had succeeded in finding her lost darlings. No one had the heart to tell her that the Captain had, before noon that day, received a wireless message to the effect that the search which had been prolonged far into the morning had proved fruitless.

A wave of remorse swept over the soul of Bertha Ashmere as she fled from the deck back to her cabin; but she once more steeled herself against all emotion, and throwing herself on her bed, fell into a troubled sleep. When she awoke she was surprised to see Berta sitting up, regarding her with big, wondering eyes. The flush of fever was gone and the child looked refreshed after a good night's sleep.

"Where is my muzzer, Mrs. Beuce?" she demanded with the gravity of a judge. The stewardess bringing in the breakfast was obliged to turn her back to hide the smile she could not repress. "No, 'oo stay over zere, but I want my muzzer yight now," as Mrs. Ashmere rose to approach her. "I don't want *'oo*, I want muzzer, and if 'oo don't get her yight twick I'll have to go find her mine own self, 'tause I want her; and ven she tums 'oo'll have to go way, 'tause zis house is too yitty for so many peoples. It's jes' bid 'nuf for muzzer and yitty sissoo and me."

The two women were astonished at this speech, but before Mrs. Ashmere could make up her mind what to reply, the look of dignity vanished suddenly, the little lips quivered, and with brimming eyes the poor baby stretched out her hands to the stewardess, who took her in her arms and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Listen, darling. God has taken your mother and little sister to heaven and if you are a good girl He will take you, too, some day."

"No, no! muzzer and yitty sissoo went in ze yitty boat and Mrs. Beuce wouldn't let me go. Muzzer wouldn't go way off to Hebben and leave her baby. Fazer's in Hebben, but muzzer's in ze yitty boat."

"Yes dear, a long thing like a boat with flowers all around it, wasn't it?"

"I don't 'member nenny flowers," said the child thoughtfully, "but lots and lots of peoples making a drefful noise." Putting her arms around the woman's neck, she drew her head down and whispered in her ear, "She say she isn't Mrs. Beuce, but she *am*. I *know* she am. Muzzer told me."

"But darling, this lady's name is Mrs. Ashmere and she is your aunt. She looks like Mrs. Bruce, I am quite sure, but she is your Aunt Bertha."

"Muzzer nebber did say zat," argued the child only half convinced, looking fixedly at her aunt. "Her eyes am jes' like Mrs. Beuce. I is a'faid of her eyes, I is."

"You mustn't be afraid of your auntie. You must love her and be a good girl if you want to go to Heaven with your mother."

"Is I dood now?"

"Yes, but you must let me go fix you some breakfast. What would you like me to bring you?"

"Toffee in a yitty chup, and toast," responded Berta promptly.

"And a big orange," added the woman. "Yes, I have a nice little cup, just the size for you, and if you will lie down now and be good, I'll come back soon with your breakfast."

"All yight," answered the child, lying back on the pillows.

The stewardess left the room, and Mrs. Ashmere, taking advantage of Berta's excellent disposition, proceeded to make friends with her. The child's solemn eyes made her so uncomfortable, that she hardly knew where to begin.

"I have a nice dolly for a good little girl," she remarked.

"I don't want nenny dolly. I want my muzzer," declared Berta.

"I am afraid you will not get to Heaven very fast at this rate, young lady."

The child fixed her eyes on the ceiling and her lips moved as if she were saying something over and over to herself. Suddenly Mrs. Ashmere heard men's voices, followed by a sharp rap at the door. She hesitated for some moments; then, trembling violently, unfastened the lock. The door was flung open and the doctor entered, followed by two men. Mrs. Ashmere, unable to utter a word, bowed in response to their salutation and stood leaning heavily against the wall. The doctor, addressing the elder of his two companions, said, "This, sir, is the only child that came aboard with the survivors of the wreck. Exposure and too much excitement brought on a high fever. She is better, I see, this morning."

The man addressed felt the child's pulse, asked a few questions of the ship's doctor, made some notes in a small book, and bowing courteously to Mrs. Ashmere, withdrew, followed by the others. With an exclamation of relief, the lady sank into a chair.

"Quarantine officers! I thought they were detectives! I shall be a nervous wreck before this day is over," and hearing the rattle of dishes outside the door, she strove to compose herself before the stewardess could observe her agitation. But the latter, entering with a little tray, was at once attracted by Berta's preoccupied air.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"She talled me 'youn' lady'," replied the child, disdainfully, "and I is only a yitty dirl."

"Well, you will soon grow to be a young lady."

But Berta shook her head emphatically, exclaiming, "No, no! I is going to be a dood yitty dirl and go to Hebben."

"So you are," agreed the stewardess.

She took the child on her lap, and the breakfast was soon disposed of.

"Oh! I fordot sumpin."

"What did you forget, dear?"

"I fordot my gwapes."

"Shall I get her some grapes?" asked the woman, turning to Mrs. Ashmere.

"Not zat kind of gwapes, but zis kind." The child made the sign of the cross and began, "Fank 'oo, dear Dod, for all zese dood fings, and p'ease take me up to Hebben yight twick. Amen." Then turning to the stewardess, she continued, "I said my mornin' pwayers afore she woke up," jerking her head towards her aunt. "She neber did say nenny pwayers at all."

"Oh, I am sure she did," replied the woman. "Your auntie is a good kind lady who loves you very much, and you must mind what she tells you. Good-by now, and be a good girl."

"I wis' 'oo would stay wif me and be my auntie. I love 'oo," cried the child, clinging to her friend with all her small strength.

"But I can't, darling. Maybe I'll come to see you some day. How will that do?"

"Oh, p'ease tum yight twick! Dood-by, I is going to be a dood dirl always."

The stewardess left the room without realizing the powerful weapon she had placed in Bertha Ashmere's hands. Henceforth, all that the latter had to say was, "If you are not a good girl, you can't go to Heaven with your mother," and Berta would comply with her slightest wish.

As the morning wore on, she became more and more nervous. Long before eight o'clock, fearing lest the vessel should land sooner than the time announced, she proceeded to give Berta the powder.

"Lie down now, and go to sleep," she said.

"But I isn't fleepy, not one teeny bit."

"Well, try to go to sleep, anyway."

" 'Oo is always telling me, 'Go to fleep.' Muzzer neber did say zat all ze time."

Mrs. Ashmere paid no heed to this statement, but took up a book and attempted to read. The child lay quite still, watching her for some time; then, the powerful drug taking effect, she fell into a heavy slumber. Now was the time for Mrs. Ashmere to act. She tied a dark veil about her head, drawing it far down over her forehead so as to leave very little of her face exposed. Wrapping Berta in a blanket, she concealed the child as much as possible beneath her heavy shawl, part of which she drew over her head. In ordinary circumstances her strange costume would have excited comment, but blankets and shawls were almost the only wraps the rescued passengers had been able to bring from the wreck, so she was only one of many similarly attired. Having waited until the passage-ways and halls were pretty well deserted, she made her way to the deck near the part of the railing where she knew the gang-plank would be lowered. Knots of people were gathered here and there, but she kept her face turned from them and pulled the shawl farther forward. The moments seemed hours. Berta slept on in a heavy stupor. Indeed, as Mrs. Ashmere arranged the shawl so as to allow more air to reach the child, she was alarmed at the increasing pallor of the little face. Had she given her an overdose of the drug? If so, what would be the result? Suppose she should lose the child after all. These and many thoughts of like nature swarmed through her brain, and she breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the two tugs at last securely fastened to the steamer. The passengers began to crowd forward, but she kept her place. She could see the throngs of people on the dock, eagerly awaiting the moment when the big vessel should come to a standstill. At last, when the gang-plank was in place, cheer upon cheer rose from hundreds of throats. The regular passengers allowed the rescued to descend

first. Mrs. Ashmere waited until two or three such groups had passed, then followed so closely after one of them that she might easily have been mistaken by the onlookers for a member of the party. As she neared the end of the gang-plank, she saw Doctor Carlton, whom she recognized from his likeness to his sister, standing as close as possible to the rail. Her heart almost ceased to beat as she passed him. Then, hastening to one of the Custom House officials, she quickly convinced him that she had nothing for inspection, and was allowed to proceed on her way. She entered a cab, ordering the driver to take her at once to the nearest hospital, for she was really alarmed about Berta. The old doctor whom she saw there listened impatiently to the story she told of having given the drug to ease excessive pain in the head from which the child had for some time been suffering.

"Is she your child?" he demanded gruffly.

"My niece."

"It's a good thing you weren't blessed with any of your own. They'd all be dead long ago if you treated them like this," he declared, scolding and fuming about the foolishness of women in general, while he administered to Berta something to counteract the effects of the powder. He then ordered Mrs. Ashmere to engage a room in the hospital until the next day, and to do all in her power to rouse the child. But to remain over night in New York was out of the question. When she told the doctor of her determination to leave the city that afternoon, the old man declared that he would not answer for the consequences of so rash a proceeding. In spite of all remonstrances, Bertha Ashmere ordered a carriage to take her to the station, where she boarded a train for Albany, in the suburbs of which city her beautiful home was situated.

Meanwhile a touching scene had taken place at the dock. From the time the news of the disaster had reached New York, Doctor Carlton had haunted the steamship offices and the docks, eagerly seizing any scrap

of information that had been received there. Break of day, Wednesday, found him again on the dock, for though his sister's name was among the missing, he hoped against hope that there had been a mistake, or that the captains of the rescuing vessels had received some late news of *Number 16*. Until that boat was satisfactorily accounted for, he would not give up. Besides, he must look out for Aunt Mandy whom he well knew was overwhelmed with grief at her separation from her charges.

When the first steamer was securely moored, he took his place at the foot of the gang-plank, anxiously scanning the different groups that passed. Not even the sight of Aunt Mandy rewarded his scrutiny. Another weary wait for the second steamer! In the meantime, he sought out the captain of the first and learned all that the latter knew of the wreck and the subsequent rescue. Then he made his way to the dock where the second vessel was expected, and after what seemed an eternity, he once more saw the gang-plank firmly fixed. It was with difficulty that he restrained his desire to push aside the presiding officer and rush up on the deck. Group after group passed him, to be met and embraced by loved ones on the dock. Where was Aunt Mandy? With a word of explanation to the officer, the Doctor started up the incline, but he had gone only a few feet when he saw the bowed form of the old servant about to descend. In her trembling hands she still clutched the big green umbrella, and tears of disappointment and fresh grief rained down the withered cheeks; for she had waited to see the captain, who had nothing new to tell her. Hastening towards her, the Doctor grasped her by both hands.

"O Marse Frank, Marse Frank honey," sobbed the poor old creature.

"There, there, Auntie, don't try to talk now," he said soothingly, leading her on and on, past the happy groups that paused sympathetically in their gay chatter to watch the oddly mated pair. At last the carriage was

reached, and, after almost lifting the old woman into it, the Doctor took his place beside her. In spite of his longing to hear her story, he waited patiently for her to begin. When she had somewhat mastered her emotion, she regarded him silently for some moments, then began in a low tone, "Marse Frank, honey, yo' doan think as how I didn't tek good care ob dem, does yo', honey?"

"No, Auntie, a thousand times *no!* We all feel that you would have given your life for them if you had had the chance."

"I sho' would, Marse Frank, I sho' would. De only trubble war I neber did git de chance; kase when dat ship war hit, I wuz frowed up agin de wall wif sech turrible ambition dat I neber knowed nuffin fo' de good Lawd knows how long. When I done got ma senses back, I heerd folkses runnin' ober ma haid, an I done grabbed some blankits and dis yeah umbrell an' lit out fo' Miss Lisbuf's room. But when I got thar it war plumb empty; so I grabbed mo' blankits and ran up to de deck, an' de officer he done say all de fust-class folkses war gone down already in dem little boats an' he knowed what he war talkin' 'bout, he said. An' he put dis poah ole niggah in a boat asayin' as how I'd soon be wif ma mist'ess again. An' when we wuz all took up on de odder ships I hunted an' hunted, an' axed an' axed, an' de capting he done inquiahed on de odder ship, an' nobuddy had seed Miss 'Lisbuf an' dem bressed lambs, an' den dey done say dey must be in *Numbah 16;* an' dey lef' de ship to find dat *Numbah 16,* an' I wanted to stay an' help, but de capting wouldn't heah on it nohow. An' de capting jes' done tole me they cain't find it, an' O! Marse Frank, Marse Frank! why fo' de good Lawd didn't tek dis wufless ole niggah an' spare dem bressed lambs!" and the poor old woman once more abandoned herself to her grief. The Doctor himself was too much overcome to speak. He was glad when the carriage stopped and Liza and Tom came out to claim their grandmother.

Hastening to a neighboring church, the strong man gave vent to his sorrow. Suddenly he started up. Might not the missing boat have been picked up by some slow vessel not equipped with the Marconi System? If so, the news would not yet have reached New York. It was only one chance in a thousand and—still, it was a chance. Leaving the church, he made his way once more to the steamship offices, where he had become a familiar figure. He was shown into the private office of Mr. Burton, a friend of his, who listened attentively to his proposition.

"Doctor, I must admit that there is such a chance. The thing is not impossible; but, as man to man, I must tell you that it is highly improbable. If the missing boat were not drawn down with the sinking ship, why was it not with the others when the rescuing steamers arrived? Even granting that, owing to the dense fog, it became somewhat separated from them, the sailors would never have pulled so far from the scene of the wreck as to be beyond range of the powerful search lights used on such occasions. Then, as you have heard, the third vessel remained until far into the next day and, the fog having lifted, made a thorough search of the neighboring waters. No, Doctor, to be perfectly candid with you, I cannot see that there is a ghost of a chance, and from my heart I sympathize with you."

"It would not be quite so bad if it weren't for the child," the Doctor whispered, huskily. "She is all alone, now."

"Why man, no father could be more devoted than you are to that little girl. Between you and Mother Madeline, she is well provided for, indeed."

But the Doctor shook his head sadly.

"You don't know my niece, sir. I love her as if she were my own child, and the little thing is very fond of me. She has never caused me a moment's anxiety, but —I am *not* her father. Even I, knowing her as I do, was surprised at the depth of feeling she showed when

I told her of his death, and now——" he dropped his head in his hands.

"She knows nothing yet?"

"Nothing, except that there has been a delay."

"Then I should tell her no more for a few days. Not that I really have any hope—I wish I had—but strange things have happened in cases of this kind, and, as I said, may happen again. Wait a day or two."

"Yes, I think it will be the better way. I have warned my sister at the Convent, and I trust there is no danger that the child will hear of the disaster."

Wringing his friend's hand, the Doctor left the office.

Was there nothing he could do? Would it be of any avail to send telegrams and cablegrams to the various ports? No; for he well knew that news of the missing boat, received at any one of them, would be instantly wired to New York. There was nothing to do but wait.

As his mind reverted to Mary, he suddenly remembered that the morrow would be Commencement Day, and he pictured the child's bitter disappointment at his absence. But he could not go. He had sent a special delivery to Mother Madeline when the news of the wreck first reached him; since then he had several times communicated with her over the 'phone, for he feared that he could not see his sister at the Convent without Mary's hearing of his visit. He would 'phone again, telling her what little he had learned during the morning, and cautioning her to keep the child in ignorance for a while longer.

CHAPTER VI.

COMMENCEMENT DAY.

Old Dan sat in state on a rustic bench just inside the big gates. He was there to do honor to the friends and patrons of Maryvale, who were arriving from the city to attend the Commencement Exercises. Already one of the trains was in, and as everything on wheels had been pressed into service to convey the guests from the station to the Convent, Dan had little time for reflection between the arrival of one vehicle and the next. Occasionally a big automobile swung through the gates and swept up the broad driveway. Everyone had a kind word for the aged gardener, for the oldest among them could not remember a Commencement Day that Dan was not at his post to bid them welcome. Indeed, Maryvale without Dan would be like the northern heavens without the Pole Star. Very early that morning he had attired himself, not in his Sunday best, but in a suit reserved for great occasions only,—Christmas, Easter, Mother's Feast, and Commencement Day. The silk hat and frock coat of a style worn fifty years before; the shining collar and bright tie; the gold-headed cane, white kid gloves, gay silk pocket-handkerchief, and the patent leather boots were all familiar to the guests. Not so the expression of anxiety and preoccupation which today clouded the usually beaming countenance. The old man seemed to be in a brown study and almost allowed two or three vehicles to pass without the customary salute. Presently there was a lull in the arrivals. Dan arose and went out the gate as far as the road. After a long look in both directions, he took out his big gold watch and saw that there was still a quarter of an hour before the next train was due. Returning to the bench, he peered about him into the shrubbery, and when satisfied that he was entirely alone,

adjusted his spectacles and carefully drew from an inside pocket a crumpled newspaper. Spreading it out on his knee, he looked sadly at the large picture which occupied half the front page,—a great ocean liner from which the life-boats were being lowered. For the fortieth time the crooked old finger followed the print, line after line, as he read aloud the account of the wreck of the *Helena*, every few moments glancing furtively about him, like a school-boy fearing to be caught in some mischief.

"My poor little lady! My poor little lady!" he murmured over and over again. "First her father, and now this. I wonder if they know it up yonder," with a nod in the direction of the Convent. "She doesn't yet, or she'd have told me last night. 'Mr. Daniel,' sez she to me, 'you know I've been expecting Uncle today, but something must have happened to detain him.' Them was her very words. 'Detain him,' sez she to me. 'So I'll have to be patient till the morning,' sez she. And all the time she was talkin' and rattlin' on about them babies and her mother, 'twas all I could do to keep in from cryin', aknowin' as I did about this 'er," tapping the paper before him. "She'll be disappointed again about her uncle, for that man'll never come out here today, aknowin' what he knows, thinks I." Again he fell to musing, wiping his eyes occasionally with the gorgeous handkerchief.

Mary had been at the Convent only a few days when her love and care of growing things won his old heart. She was the only one of all the children privileged to enter his flower garden; and in the pocket of his working coat he always carried a clean newspaper with which he carefully lined the wheel-barrow that served as a carriage for his "little queen." Even though she had to ride backwards and let her feet dangle, she thoroughly enjoyed being trundled up and down the rose alleys and in and out among the beautiful flower-beds, her rapturous exclamations at sight of the "dear little rose-buds" and fair white lilies pleasing the old man mightily. He

never let her go without a bunch of her favorite flowers for Our Blessed Mother's altar; for though he raised all his flowers to the end that they might adorn the sanctuary, he felt that their value was enhanced when they were offered through the hands of this innocent little child. The previous evening she had asked especially for two tiny rose-buds—a white one for Beth, and a red one for Berta—which she placed in a tiny vase at the feet of our Lady's statue, with a prayer for the safety of her darlings. The old man almost choked at the remembrance, and had great trouble recovering his composure when he heard the sound of wheels on the hard road outside. The last train was in. No sign of Doctor Carlton. Suddenly he remembered that the Doctor always brought his little niece a large bouquet on this day, and muttering, "Well, she'll not be disappointed there, at any rate," he hobbled across the lawn towards the garden.

And where was the object of all this solicitude? Immediately after breakfast she had returned to her little room, which she put in apple-pie order, then proceeded to dress for the exercises. They were always held in the morning so that the pupils who lived at a distance might have plenty of time to reach New York and catch the evening trains to their homes. With the exception of the graduates, very few took part in the exercises, it being a rare thing for a child of Mary's age to appear, unless for premiums. During the year, several recitals were given; and the juniors, as well as the seniors, had a play early in the spring. Only great proficiency in music or elocution entitled a pupil to a place on the Commencement program. Mary, who really had remarkable talent for the former, was about to make her first appearance alone in public. She had before this taken part in numerous entertainments, but always in company with the girls of her class.

With many a little tremor she performed her simple toilet, and her excitement was increased by the fact that she expected her mother and little sisters; for though

Mother Madeline, complying with her brother's wishes, had on the previous day told her that a delay in the arrival of the ship would prevent her uncle's coming after her, the poor child never suspected that any serious accident had taken place, and confidently looked forward to a happy reunion with her loved ones. Not a hint of last night's 'phone message had she heard. All had agreed that until there was not the faintest doubt of the loss of *Number 16,* the child should be left in ignorance of what had happened. So the little maid sang gaily as she brushed her fair, shining hair; and Sister Austin's heart throbbed with pity when she heard the sounds issuing through the open transom and thought of the terrible blow which would, in all probability, so soon descend on the happy child.

There was a light tap on the door and Grace Thornton, a girl of sixteen, entered, saying, "I thought you might need some help, and as I'm not to be one of the performers, I have time to burn this morning."

"Oh, thank you so much," exclaimed Mary. "I'm nearly ready. My dress fastens in the back and I was just about to go look for someone to button me up."

"Why, how spic and span you are in here. All the other rooms look like 'deserted villages'—not a picture nor an ornament to be seen. The girls have packed them away for the summer. Do you expect to remain here?"

"No, Grace, not this year. I usually spend part of the vacation here, because Uncle Frank can't be away for more than six weeks; but this summer it will all be different. Mother will be home, and that means not only being away all vacation, but no more boarding-school, either. I want her to see how cozy I've been here, before I pack all these things."

"You're not coming back in September? Oh, I'm so sorry. The girls will all miss you, Mary."

"Miss *me!*" exclaimed the child. "Why, lots of them hardly know me. I'm not one to get chummy with folks, you know."

"That's the very reason they like you. You are the same to everyone; even the graduates love you. Oh, don't tie your hair back that way. Leave it fluffy and hanging. Let me fix it," insisted Grace, taking the comb and proceeding to arrange the long bright ringlets to her own satisfaction.

"It has grown a lot in two years and a half. Mother will think I'm wearing a wig," declared Mary, laughing gaily.

"Nothing wiggy-looking about that. Now, your dress."

"Didn't Miss Jenkins make it prettily? Mother sent the goods for my birthday and this is the first time I've worn it."

"It's just darling. I'd love to have one like it. I never saw this kind of material before—so soft and fine," exclaimed the older girl, lifting the dainty little gown from its wrappings of tissue paper.

"Mother called it some kind of a queer French name, but I've forgotten."

"Now, go ask Sister Austin if you'll do," said Grace, "while I put away these things."

Mary skipped away to find Sister.

"Grace told me to ask you if I'll do, Sister. Do you think my hair looks all right without the ribbon?"

"Yes, dear, wear it that way for a change. Tell Grace I can recommend her as a first-class lady's maid," replied Sister, laughingly.

Mary returned to Grace and proceeded to entrust her with an important secret.

"I'm going up in the cupola now to watch," she announced.

"Mercy on us! in those clothes?" exclaimed Grace, horrified.

"Yes, I cleaned it all up nicely yesterday so there isn't a speck of dust there. If anyone is looking for me, you'll know where I am. All I'm afraid of is that when I see them coming, I'll be in such a hurry to get

to them that I'll fall down the stairs and break my bones."

"You would have a much better view of the drive-way from the windows of the German room," urged Grace. "Why, that cupola is so high you couldn't recognize anyone on the ground. The people would look like pigmies. Better try the class-room. Then, when you see them coming, you can get to the front door in time to meet them there."

"That's true," replied the child. "I wish you'd come with me. It's kind of lonely watching by myself."

"Of course I will if you want me. We had better tell Sister Austin in case anyone is looking for us."

Having obtained the desired permission, they proceeded to the class-room used by the German teacher and settled themselves at one of the large windows which commanded a fine view of the long drive-way. It was nine o'clock and the guests soon began to arrive. Mary watched eagerly as each vehicle approached the house, chattering meanwhile to the older girl about her plans for the summer.

"All the girls must meet mother today before they go home. We will stay till evening, I know, because, you see, Aunt Mary is mother's sister and they'll have lots to talk about. Then next year we'll come out often on Saturdays and holidays to spend the day, and maybe sometimes I'll stay—no, no! I don't think I could *ever* stay another night away from mother. But we shall stay all day,—mother and the babies and I. The girls all know Uncle Frank, but none of you ever met mother."

Indeed, the girls *did* know Uncle Frank, who had given them many and many a treat, and Mary's birthday was the topic of conversation for weeks before and after that joyous occasion.

"O Grace," continued the child, "if you only knew what today means for me. I think it's going to be the

very happiest day I've ever spent." Then she added in a low tone, "If only father were coming, too."

Grace saw the child's eyes fill with tears. Fearing a scene, she put her arm around the little girl, saying gently, "Don't dear, you'll only make your eyes red and look like a show. Your dear father wouldn't come back now if he could, so try to think only of the happiness that's coming to you. Why," she added cheerfully, "just look at me. You have a mother, two darling little sisters, Mother Madeline, and that uncle who simply dotes on you, while I haven't a single brother or sister."

"You *poor* thing," cried Mary in a tone of infinite pity. "But how can your father and mother spare you if you're an only child?"

"My mother is an invalid and must live up in the Adirondacks, so father left the city and bought a home there. Oh, it's a beautiful place, Mary; I want you to come there some time. There is a Church in the town near which we live, but no school for the older children; that is why I come here."

The girls lapsed into silence, listening to the big clock on the wall ticking the moments away.

"It is half-past nine," observed Grace. "Sister said to come down at a quarter to, so that they can begin promptly at ten. The Archbishop, with some of the priests, always comes on that last train, and Mother doesn't wish to keep him waiting a minute."

"Oh, I do hope Uncle won't wait for that train. If I go out to play my piece and see them sitting there, I'll just *have* to go down and hug them all around before I can play a note. Grace," she continued after a pause, "what delays ships?"

"Lots of things. I was on Lake Erie, once, in a big storm, when part of the machinery broke, and the steamer could not go ahead until it was repaired. But I think fogs are the most ordinary cause of the delays of ocean steamers. Aunt Hattie was coming from

Queenstown last fall, and the vessel was anchored down in New York Bay from Wednesday noon until Friday afternoon. She said the fog was so dense that she couldn't see three feet beyond the rail of the ship. In that case, of course, any sensible captain would anchor rather than run the risk of colliding with other boats."

"But when we're having such grand weather on land, I don't see how it can be foggy on the sea, especially so near the shore."

"It does seem strange, but you know yourself what awful storms we have up here when they don't get even a drop of rain in New York."

"That's so," said Mary, relapsing into silence.

Grace watched the expressive little face as the bright eyes eagerly scanned every group that approached. It was with reluctance that she at length said, "Come, dear, Sister will be waiting for you. They must be coming on that last train. You go down to the others who are to take part, while I slip around to tell Sister Adrian to send for you before she takes your mother into the hall. Your number comes so far down on the program that you'll have plenty of time to run to the parlor and back before you're needed."

"O Grace, you are just fine for thinking of nice things and doing them, too," exclaimed Mary, throwing her arms about the older girl before she danced away.

But somehow Grace was far from feeling the assurance her tones conveyed. If there had been a delay, she reasoned, would the steamer even yet have arrived in New York? She feared the contrary; nevertheless, she went to Sister Adrian as she had promised, then joined Mary "behind the scenes." The little girl was beginning to look anxious, for the hands of the clock pointed to five minutes to ten.

"Perhaps they missed the train and will come in an auto," suggested one of the girls.

"I think Uncle would surely have 'phoned if there was any more delay," said Mary, "though maybe he

hasn't had time. But then he would have told Tom to do it, I know."

"You just keep on hoping, and pretty soon you'll hear an auto tooting. See if you don't!" insisted her companion.

So Mary hoped on and would not give up even when Sister nodded to her that it was her turn next. "Perhaps," she said to herself, "they came so late that Sister Adrian didn't want them to miss any more of the program and took them immediately to the hall." With her fair little face glowing with hope and excitement, she went forward to the front of the stage, eagerly scanning the sea of faces before her. "Sister always puts Uncle near the front, but maybe all those seats were taken." Her eyes traveled over the audience, then rested inquiringly on Mother Madeline, who, after her first glance at the animated little countenance, had fixed her eyes steadfastly on the program in her hand, not one word of which could she see. She could not trust herself to meet the little one's frank questioning gaze; for her heart was heavy with grief and filled with almost a mother's compassion for her sister's beautiful child. The greater part of the two nights which had elapsed since she had heard of the fate of the *Helena*, had been spent on her knees before the Tabernacle, imploring for herself and her loved ones the grace and strength to bear this new trial.

The audience noticed the look of disappointment which settled on Mary's face, paler now than was its wont. Listlessly she turned towards the piano. There was a big lump in her throat and a haze before her eyes. How could she play! Then came the thought, "Well, if I *am* disappointed about them, Aunt Mary won't be disappointed in *me*. I owe her the best I can do, and Sister Dominic, too, after all the trouble she has taken to teach me." This was succeeded by another thought which gave, if possible, added zest to the nimble fingers of the little performer. "Maybe they came very late and had to stay away down near the door, so that even

Aunt Mary doesn't know they are here." As her fingers glided over the keys, murmurs of astonishment rose from the assembly; even Mother Madeline raised her head in surprise. Entirely absorbed in what was going on before them, all failed to notice the bent old figure that was slowly, but surely edging its way towards the stage.

The burst of applause which filled the hall before she could rise from the piano, astonished Mary. Oh, if she could only run away somewhere and hide. But no, —Sister Dominic had said she must make a bow; so with flushed face and sparkling eyes, she turned to the audience. Suddenly, she caught sight of Dan, who had at last mounted the steps at the side of the stage and was coming towards her, smiling and bowing.

"O Mr. Daniel, what beauties! Are those all for me?" cried the delighted child, as, forgetful of the surroundings, she ran to him with hands outstretched for the enormous bouquet of Easter lilies which the old gardener proudly bore.

"All for you, my little lady—every blessed one of 'em. I'm only sorry I haven't twice as many to give you," responded Dan heartily, as much pleased at Mary's joy as was the little girl with the huge bouquet. Taking out the gay handkerchief, he mopped his brow vigorously, for he had worked hard and fast in the hot sun.

"But you were saving these for the feast tomorrow, I just know you were, Mr. Daniel."

"They'll be all the better for goin' through your hands, Miss Mary. I knowed you'd give them to the Sacred Heart and," lowering his voice, "if you tell Sister to keep 'em in a cool place, they'll be as fresh as if I just cut 'em," he insisted, beaming down on the little maid, who had all she could do to hold his gift.

The people gazed, interested spectators of this number not down on the program. What a picture it was! The old gardener, hat in hand, the gold-headed cane under his arm, the gorgeous handkerchief which, in his

embarrassment, he flourished as a fan; the child, looking up gratefully into the withered old face. It was hard to tell which was the fairer, the mass of beautiful flowers, or the little face just above them, which, with its halo of golden hair, seemed to radiate purity, love, and light. "The Angel of the Resurrection," murmured an artist in the crowd, planning a picture on the spot.

"You are too good to me, Mr. Daniel, and you have made me very happy." Then in a whisper, "Have they come yet?"

"I hain't seen 'em, Miss Mary," he replied nervously. "You see, I went to get these, and I don't know who might ha' come at the last," he hastened to add, glad of an excuse for the unsatisfactory answer.

Mary's gaze again wandered over the audience, the expression of disappointment once more settling on her face, when suddenly realizing that hundreds of eyes were fixed on *her,* she blushed rosy-red and, burying her face in the flowers, hastened from the stage. Dan, too, overcome with confusion when he found himself alone before such an assembly, hurried to descend the steps; but the secret he guarded so jealously was too much for him, and as he made his way down the aisle, the silk handkerchief was needed to wipe away the tears.

"You played like a vision!" exclaimed one of the girls when Mary rejoined them.

"She looks like one," murmured a graduate, wondering whether, in after life, she would ever see so fair a picture.

"All take a smell, but please don't crush them; they are for the altar," said Mary, who soon made her escape, hastening with her fragrant burden to the sacristy. Sister Pierre was not there. Opening the door of the sanctuary, the little girl saw that the altar was already beautifully decorated with white roses; for at Maryvale the Closing Exercises were always concluded with

Solemn Benediction. Putting her tiny lace handkerchief on her head, she stole in, and kneeling on the altar step offered her gift to the *Prisoner of Love.* As she rose to her feet, her eyes fell on a large vase standing on the floor near our Lady's altar. "Just the thing," thought she. Arranging her lilies therein, she knelt a few moments in prayer, then hastened down to inquire of Sister Adrian if *they* had come. Sister, who saw her approaching, would gladly have avoided the interview, for she knew the question the child would ask. So when Mary drew near with an eager, "Sister, please, have they come?" she gently replied, "Not yet, dear," and hurried away as if on an errand of great importance.

Thoroughly disappointed, the little girl returned to the Chapel. Passing slowly along the corridor, she heard the Archbishop addressing the graduates and knew that the exercises were over. In the Chapel, she went to a pew far up in front of the Blessed Virgin's altar where the light was not so strong and where she hoped she would be unnoticed. Presently, the tread of many feet announced that the guests and pupils were coming upstairs. The sweet strains of the organ filled the Chapel, and Benediction began. Over the lonely little soul of the child there stole a sweet peace, and she lingered in her shaded corner long after all had departed. She could not bear to go down to her noisy, chattering companions, so when Sister Pierre had extinguished the last candle and disappeared into the sacristy, Mary followed her, hoping to be allowed to help put away the beautiful vestments. But she had no sooner delivered Dan's message about the flowers, than Grace Thornton appeared in the doorway with, "Mother Madeline wants you to come to the library to receive your prize from the Archbishop."

"Why child!" exclaimed Sister, "you don't mean to say you did not get your prize?"

"I forgot all about it, Sister," replied Mary, wearily. "I had so many other things to think about. Do I really

have to go down? I'd rather wait and have Aunt Mary give it to me. It doesn't matter so much now whether I get it or not."

"You had better go, dear, since Mother sent for you. Besides, you will get a special blessing from the Archbishop."

"I've just had our Lord's blessing, but it will be good to get the Archbishop's, too."

At the foot of the stairs, one of the Sisters was waiting to conduct her to the library, where the Archbishop and several priests were conversing with Mother Madeline and some of the Sisters. All present knew of the loss that had befallen the little girl, but they had been warned not to mention it to her. When Sister and Mary reached the door, the child shrank back at sight of the strange clergymen; but the Archbishop called to her and, rising from his chair, exclaimed, "So the little runaway is found. You are beginning early, my child, to shun the applause of the world. This is the first time I ever heard of a little girl trying to escape from receiving a well-earned prize."

"I forgot all about it, I truly did, your Grace," murmured Mary.

"Well, never mind, child," the kind-hearted man hastened to say, noticing how tired and pale she was. He looked at her searchingly, wondering how much of the coming cross she surmised, then placed in her hands a beautiful book, adding, "I wished to have the pleasure of presenting this to the little girl who contributed so much to our morning's enjoyment."

"Oh, thank you, thank you so much," said the child, earnestly, kneeling for his blessing.

The Archbishop made the sign of the cross above the little bowed figure. Then placing his right hand beside the other on the fair head, he continued, "May the All-wise and All-loving Father keep you always in His paternal embrace, and may the Mother of Mercy be truly a mother to you, and guard and protect you as her own well-beloved child forever."

"Amen," responded the priests, and Mary wondered why the Archbishop coughed that queer little cough and turned so quickly to look out of the window. And she wondered, too, why some of the reverend gentlemen used their handkerchiefs so vigorously as she rose to her feet, and, with a polite little bow to them, turned in search of Aunt Mary. But that good lady, unable any longer to restrain her emotion, had escaped to the adjoining room, and it was Sister Dominic who followed the child out into the corridor.

"You never played better, dear," she said.

"I'm so glad it was all right. I was thinking all the time of you and Aunt Mary and——and——"

"Yes, yes, I know all about it," whispered Sister, sympathetically, "and I felt for you all the while."

Mary walked slowly down the hall, still hoping to meet Aunt Mary; nor was she disappointed, for as she passed the open door of the next room, the Superior called to her. Mother Madeline, thinking she had her feelings again pretty well under control, began, "We are all proud of our little girl today."

"I'm glad you are pleased, Aunt Mary, but oh! I'm so terribly disappointed."

"So am I, darling," replied Mother, kissing the white forehead.

Mary was sure she saw tears on the dark lashes.

"May I stay here a little while with you, Auntie?"

"I am sorry, dear, but I must go back to the company. All those great folks in there will go home as soon as they have had dinner, for they intend to take the two o'clock train. Then I shall be free, and we shall go off somewhere, all by ourselves. Will that do? Until then, run down to the little breakfast room where Wilhelmina and her mother are waiting for you. Sister is going to serve a fine dinner there, for just you three."

"I don't feel much like talking to visitors, or like eating anything, either."

"But Mrs. Marvin is such an old friend that she ought not to seem like a visitor exactly. And after you sit quietly with her for a little while, you will be quite ready for some dinner. All this excitement is bad for little folks, I fear."

"It isn't that—it's my throat."

"Is it sore, dear?" asked Mother anxiously.

"Not sore, but queer and lumpy. Kind of a choky feeling."

"I see. Well now, I shall prescribe for that. A big easy chair, a good laugh at Wilhelmina's nonsense, some fried chicken, etcetera, etcetera, a little nap, and then a stroll with your old auntie under the trees by the lake. Run away, now, and begin to take your medicine at once."

Mary slowly pursued her way towards the breakfast room, wondering, the while, what ailed everybody. She knew that Aunt Mary was just trying to be gay, and she certainly did look as if she had been crying. What had happened to make every one seem so sad? She had always considered Commencement as one of the happiest days of the year, and though disappointment had spoiled this one for her, she could not see why others should not be as gay as usual. Reasoning thus, she had almost reached the breakfast room, when out danced Wilhelmina.

"Oh, you're coming at last. Just about time! My! what a *bee-yew-tee-ful* book! Look, mother, Mary won her class-prize."

Mrs. Marvin greeted her affectionately.

"Come, sit here by me. You look so tired," drawing the child down beside her on the lounge and smoothing back the fair hair.

"I *am* tired—more than I thought," admitted Mary, leaning contentedly against the friendly shoulder. "I was up pretty early and didn't eat much breakfast, because I was in such a hurry to get ready and watch for——" but here her voice broke, and closing her

eyes, she sat for a long time in silence. Mrs. Marvin, who knew all, looked anxiously at the pale face. She was glad when Sister entered with the tray.

"I fear you have two very hungry little people here, Sister. They have both confessed that they ate scarcely any breakfast."

"Then they will surely do justice to this fine dinner," replied Sister. "If there is anything I dislike, it is stylish people who sit up and nibble at things, instead of eating like proper Christians."

"You'll pronounce us ready for martyrdom, Sister, for I'm simply avaricious," cried Wilhelmina.

"If you mean 'voracious,' say so, child," laughed Mrs. Marvin. "Let us see what adjective my daughter can apply to you, Mary," she continued, as they took their places at the table.

"Indeed, mother, I can't come anywhere near Mary when it's a question of big words. What is the one you used last night?" turning to Mary. "Something like 'per-am——,' but I give it up. By the way, I couldn't find it in the dictionary," she added teasingly; and so the meal progressed, Wilhelmina chattering like a magpie, Mary brightening visibly all the while.

Finally, Mrs. Marvin declared that she and Wilhelmina must go if they intended to catch the next train. How she longed to carry Mary off with them to their beautiful southern home, and there give her a good mothering. But it could not be—at least, not at present——and with loving farewells, the mother and daughter took their departure from Maryvale.

"I think I'll stay here and wait for Aunt Mary if you don't mind, Sister."

"Yes, do, Mary. Lie down there on the lounge for a while, and I shall tell her you are here."

Half an hour later, when Mother Madeline stole in, she found her little niece sound asleep, and heaved a sigh of relief that the ordeal was for even a short time postponed. Any moment might bring a 'phone mes-

sage from her brother, and she had made up her mind to insist on his coming out to see the child. He could still plead a delay and manage somehow to keep her in ignorance of what all feared would prove to be facts. But the hours passed, bringing no message, for the Doctor had found it necessary to make a short trip to Long Island.

On the train returning to New York, he sat wrapped in his own sad thoughts, until, looking about him at one of the stations, he caught sight of the head-lines on the paper in the hands of the man in the seat before him.

"For Heaven's sake, sir, give me that!" he cried. Snatching the paper from his astonished neighbor, he read, "MISSING BOAT, *NUMBER 16,* FOUND; Picked up by French Sailing Vessel, Wednesday, P. M.; Passengers Transferred to Steamer *Ottria,* Bound for New York." Then followed a list of the rescued, and with a groan the Doctor dropped the paper—Elizabeth Selwyn's name was not among them! Again he seized the printed sheet, reading over and over the short list of names, hoping against hope that his eyes had deceived him. Finally, he thrust the paper into its owner's hands, asking hoarsely, "Can you find *Selwyn,* or anything like it, there?"

The man, thinking he was dealing with a maniac, hastened to read the list, but was obliged to confess that no such name, nor anything similar to it, appeared there.

"My sister and her children should have been on that boat, sir," explained the Doctor, as he rose to leave the train. He hastened to the docks and learned that the *Ottria* was due Saturday afternoon. He would see the officer and the sailors who had manned the life-boat. Perhaps there was some mistake.

There was another person more mystified than Doctor Carlton at the absence of Mrs. Selwyn's name from the list of those rescued from *Number 16.* This was Bertha Ashmere. What had become of her sister-in-

law and Beth? Who were the Mrs. Bruce and child whose names headed the list? *Bruce*, the name she herself had assumed. Was there anyone of that name among the second-class passengers? Had such been the case, she was sure she would have noticed it on the sailing-list. There *was* a Mrs. Brooks and child—of that she was positive—so she concluded that *Bruce* was a misprint. But *where* was Elizabeth Selwyn? A long time she pondered over this problem, but finding no satisfactory solution, dismissed it from her mind as she might any other disagreeable topic.

CHAPTER VII.

NUMBER 16.

And where *was* Elizabeth Selwyn?

We left her sleeping from sheer exhaustion on the arm of Mrs. O'Malley, who finally succeeded in taking Beth from her.

At the first streak of dawn, the officer in charge of the boat sprang to his feet and with his glass swept the surrounding waters. Muttering something about the mists, he resumed his seat, but the sailors and many of the passengers knew that the rays of the rising sun would reveal to them what he dreaded they should know. Gradually the mists lifted, curling away like wreaths of thin smoke, and around them on all sides, as far as eye could see, stretched that vast expanse of blue, rippling water, with not a speck to mar its beauty. Again the officer used his glass, and again resumed his seat. No word was spoken. Silence, silence, silence, broken only by the occasional ripple of the water against the boat.

Suddenly the boy, who during the night had crept from beneath the ropes which concealed him and was now leaning over the bow of the boat, uttered an exclamation of surprise and motioned to the sailor nearest him. The latter, also, leaned over the bow, then returned to his place saying quietly, "We have made good speed, over night. Couldn't have done better if we'd pulled for it."

"What do you mean?" came from all around him.

"I mean that this boat has somehow been caught in a current, which has carried us far from the scene of the wreck. No wonder we saw and heard nothing of the rescue steamers. We would have seen their lights, I suppose, except for the fog. Like as not,

one of them is still there looking for us. All that puzzles me is that the other boats escaped this current."

"I guess there are many such streams in the ocean," observed another sailor, "but they are too small to interfere with the big ships, though powerful enough with a peanut shell like this, as we've found to our cost."

"It is better than standing still, at any rate," said one of the passengers. "We shall be carried somewhere and may sight a steamer before night."

But the officer shook his head gloomily.

The passengers wondered that the rapid progress of the boat had not been noticed, but they soon realized that even in daylight, with nothing stationary by which to gauge distance, they could perceive no forward motion. It was the prow of the boat cutting through the water, that attracted the boy's attention.

Silence fell again on the little group. The sailors kept a sharp lookout, while the officer, despite his forebodings, never lowered his glass.

All this time Mrs. Selwyn had slept, unconscious of the discovery just made. Presently she woke, sprang to her feet, and eagerly scanned the sea on all sides. Then with the piercing cry, "My little lost child!" she fell senseless in the bottom of the boat.

* * * * * *

Saturday came at last, and Doctor Carlton, unable to again bear the delay attendant on the landing of a great steamer, took the train to Sandy Hook, and going out from that point with the pilot, boarded the *Ottria* early in the afternoon. From the officer and the sailors of *Number 16,* he learned all that they knew of the wreck; but neither they, nor any of the passengers whom he carefully interrogated, had so much as heard the name *Selwyn.* They told him of the only one of the ladies in *Number 16* who had a child with her,—a haggard, grey-haired woman, apparently mid-

dle-aged, accompanied by an Irish woman, probably the nurse, who had distinctly given *Bruce* as the lady's name, and *O'Malley* as her own. The lady seemed much affected by the horror of that terrible night, and showed great anxiety about the child, a frail little thing of scarcely two years, who was very ill, and whom the mother had evidently given up as lost. When the sailing-vessel picked them up, late Wednesday afternoon, the stewardess took Mrs. Bruce and the child to her own apartments, and Mrs. O'Malley went with them. The following day, when the *Ottria* was sighted, the doctor declared that Mrs. Bruce was in no condition to be moved and insisted that she should be taken to the hospital at Bordeaux, which port was the destination of the sailing vessel. Mrs. O'Malley and a little boy, also, remained on the French vessel.

"But sir," exclaimed the Doctor, turning to the officer, "how do you account for the fact that my sister, a first-cabin passenger, was lost, while second and third-class passengers, and even the crew escaped in safety. My sister's servant was assured by one of the officers that no first-cabin passengers remained on the vessel before she, poor, faithful old soul, could be persuaded to enter a life-boat, and she had then just come from my sister's stateroom which she had found empty."

"That officer certainly believed he was telling the truth, sir, for the captain had ascertained that all the first-class staterooms were vacated before the second-class passengers were allowed in the boats. The only way I can account for it is this. The vessel was struck by a submerged ice-field, and, though badly damaged, could have floated for hours in that condition. To allay the fears of the people, they were told that there was no immediate danger. In all probability your sister heard this and returned to her stateroom for valuables or more wraps after the captain had received the report that all the passengers had escaped to the deck. While she was there, the vessel was again struck, the damage proving so great that she sank in a few

minutes. Anyone burdened, as you say your sister was, with two small children, would have found escape impossible. Certain it is, that she did not enter a lifeboat; for though some confusion prevailed, owing to the terror of many of the passengers, the filling and lowering of the boats was conducted in an orderly manner, and there were no accidents. Indeed, I was sure, until I met you, that Captain Crosby and the first mate were the only victims."

The Doctor turned sadly away. The officer's conclusion seemed to be the only reasonable one that could be drawn, though in his heart the Doctor felt that it was most unlike Elizabeth to return to the stateroom after having once made her escape. But the facts of the case remained, and her disappearance, he mused, was only one more of the many secrets to be disclosed "when the sea gives up its dead."

And *he* must tell Mary!

The thought was overwhelming. He shrank from it as he had never in his life shrunk from anything. He could not—he would not tell her! He would take passage on one of the ships in the bay and flee to the ends of the earth,—anywhere—anything, rather than be the bearer of such news to the little one he so tenderly loved. Suddenly, he saw the words as clearly as on the day when he read them in a tear-stained, black-bordered letter,—"You will be a father to my fatherless little girl,"—and with them came the memory of a promise made and, until now, faithfully kept. Would Robert Selwyn forsake his child in this her hour of greatest need? The Doctor looked at his watch. It was after four o'clock; the vessel was nearing the dock. Quickly he made his plans. He would spend that evening and part of the next day in seeing such of the first-class passengers as resided in New York, hoping to obtain from them some information of his sister and the children that might prove of consolation to Mary after the first shock was over. The following afternoon he would go out to the Convent.

As soon as the gang-plank was placed, he hastened from the ship, pushing his way through the crowds on the dock, where he recognized several faces aglow with happiness, which three days before had looked as hopeless as his own.

CHAPTER VIII.

HEARTS BOWED DOWN.

Ma-ry—Sel-wyn's—want—ed—in—the—par-lor!——Ma-a-a-ry—Sel-l-l-lwyn's—want—ed—in—the—par—ar-ar—lor—r—r!" sang little Helen Harden, as she ran swiftly down the walk. She had been standing near the door-way talking to Sister Austin when Mother Madeline came quickly from the house and said to Sister in a low tone, "Mary's uncle is here and—" but Helen waited to hear no more.

Mary, far down on the grounds trying to become interested in a story, heard the shrill call, sprang to her feet, and like an arrow flew towards the house entering it through a door-way at the end of the west wing. Helen, seeing that her message had been received, danced back to the two Sisters who still stood in earnest conversation.

"I told her," she cried.

"Told whom?" asked Sister Austin.

"Told Mary to go to the parlor, and I never saw her run so fast in all my life."

"Which way did she go? Quick, child, so I can stop her!" exclaimed Mother Madeline.

"In the end door through the recreation room," replied Helen, frightened now, and feeling that she had made some big mistake.

Mother hastened in to the long corridor, hoping to meet Mary there; for the Doctor had begged her to say something to the little girl to prepare her for the coming blow. But she was too late; Mary, having sped through this corridor some moments before, had already turned down the main one leading to the parlors. Her uncle heard her quick light step as she approached the open door.

"She knows nothing yet," he groaned, dropping his head in his hands. Suddenly the steps ceased. He knew she had stopped abruptly at the door, but he could not look up. With his head still bowed on his left hand, he stretched out his right towards her. She ran to him with the piteous cry, "O, Uncle! don't look like that! Say it isn't true, Uncle! Oh, say it isn't true. You looked like that when father died. Don't Uncle, don't look like that!" and with a moan she slipped to her knees beside him and clung to his arm, beseeching him over and over again, "Say it isn't true Uncle; dear, *dear* Uncle, say it isn't true!"

Tenderly he lifted her to his knee and held her close, whispering in a voice choked with emotion, "I wish I could, darling, oh, how I wish I could!" and the strong man's tears fell in streams on the little golden head on his shoulder.

Thus Mother Madeline found them, noting with a pang the many white hairs among what had, a week ago, been a glossy brown. She drew up a chair and sat silently wiping away her own tears. Suddenly Mary sat upright exclaiming, "I don't believe it, I can't, oh, I can't! *you'll* say it isn't true, Aunt Mary, *won't* you?" but in that loved face she saw nothing to give the slightest hope, and sobbing piteously, she again hid her face on the Doctor's shoulder. The poor man looked appealingly at his sister, but she shook her head, making a sign to him that it was better to let the child relieve her overcharged little heart as she would. In low tones she spoke to her brother about the events of the past week, and presently even Mary stifled her sobs to listen to the whole story of the wreck. It was only too clear that her uncle had done all that mortal power could do to obtain every particle of information that would prove beyond doubt the loss of their loved ones. Telegrams and cablegrams without number had been sent; steamship companies had been interviewed; passengers of the ill-fated vessel had been interrogated. There was only one conclusion to it all—Elizabeth Sel-

wyn had never left the *Helena,* but had, with her little ones, gone down when the steamer sank.

"Father gone, and mother gone, and the darling babies, and I'm left—left all alone—oh, no, no!" she cried hastily, catching sight of the expression of pain that swept over the Doctor's countenance, "I don't mean that, not *that!*" and she threw her arms about his neck, passionately kissing the worn, haggard face. "I can never be *that* while I have you and dear, dear Aunt Mary."

"I understand perfectly, darling," he replied, lovingly returning her caresses, "and I'm glad you realize how much we *do* love you even though we can never take the place of those you have lost." Stroking the soft hair from the hot little forehead, he wiped away the tears that forced themselves from under the closed lids.

The three sat, silently occupied with their own sad thoughts. Mother Madeline, who from the first had entertained no hope, was glad that at last the ordeal was over. Presently Mary, perfectly quiet now, slipped from her uncle's embrace, announcing that she thought she would go away for a little while. The Doctor looked anxiously at Mother Madeline, but she encouraged the child, saying, "Yes, dear, go out under the trees where it is cool, if you like," and Mary, embracing them affectionately, went slowly from the room. But it was not to the lawn nor the garden that she betook herself. She longed to be where she had so often found help and comfort, and, avoiding the corridors where she would be apt to meet anyone, she stole up to pour out her little heart to "The Father of the fatherless."

The Doctor did not remain long with his sister, but promising to return the next day, took the five-thirty train to the city. After his departure, Mother Madeline repaired immediately to the yard in search of Mary. Up and down the walks she went, in and out among the trees and shrubbery, visiting all the little girl's favorite

haunts; but no trace of the child could she find. Then, as a matter of importance required her presence indoors, she was obliged to let Sister Austin continue the search. After an hour's time, the Superior was once more free, and somewhat surprised that Mary had not yet been brought to her, she was about to go again in quest of the child when Sister Austin, looking decidedly anxious, appeared in the doorway.

"We have searched every nook and corner of the house and grounds, Mother, and with the exception of the book she was reading when she received the message to go to the parlor, there is not a trace of her."

"Did you look in the Chapel, Sister?"

"I went there first."

The older nun thought for a moment. "Perhaps Dan could enlighten us as to her whereabouts," she suggested.

"I have already seen him, Mother, and he knows nothing. He has gone to explore the borders of the lake, fearing lest she may have fallen in; but how could she get near the water?" for, as a necessary precaution, a high iron fence had been placed some feet from its edge, making it impossible for anyone to approach it except through a gate of which only the Superior and the old gardener had keys. "If it were Wilhelmina Marvin, now, I should say drag the lake by all means, but——"

"You don't mean to tell me, Sister, that Wilhelmina could climb that fence!"

"She might not actually climb it, Mother, but she would find a means of getting over it if she took the notion. I have seen that child swinging from limb to limb of the tallest tree on the place in order to escape a reprimand; and when, with my heart in my mouth, I finally succeeded in getting her to come down, I was so thankful, that I could not give her either of the scoldings she so richly deserved. So much for a child with eight brothers!"

"I wonder, Sister, if it can be possible that Mary waited near the gate and persuaded my brother to take her with him. Still, in that case, he would certainly have phoned as soon as he reached home. I think I shall call him up, anyway."

The Doctor was in his office and answered promptly. "Did you see Mary again before you left, Frank?"

"Why no. I looked about as I went down the drive, but could not catch even a glimpse of her. What is the trouble?"

"She has hidden away somewhere so that we can't find her."

"That's bad. She should not be left so much alone. Where could she possibly be?"

"That is what we cannot imagine. Just a moment—here she is now. It is all right, Frank, good-night."

"I'm so sorry, Auntie. Sister Austin just told me how worried you have been."

"I was getting pretty anxious, dear, and thought perhaps Uncle Frank had kidnapped you. But I see you have been in good company," said Mother, smiling at Sister Pierre who had entered the room with the child.

"No, Mother, she has not been in the sacristy. I found her in a much better place. Going to our Lady's altar to replenish the little lamp, I almost walked on her, sound asleep on the step. But she will tell you all about it herself. I am going down to get her a glass of milk," said Sister, leaving the room.

"You need something more than milk, my dear child. Come down with me and we shall find some supper," urged Mother Madeline.

"I couldn't eat anything now, Auntie, truly. Sister Pierre wanted to get me some supper, but I told her only the milk. Just something cold, please. I feel so hot," replied the little girl, brushing back the curls from her forehead.

Mother led her to a chair and sat down beside her.

"So you have been all this time with our Lord, dearie. I thought they would find you there, but Sister Austin herself told me she looked, and you were nowhere to be seen."

"Yes, I was there all the time. When I first went into the Chapel, no one was there; so I knelt in the front pew a little while; but when the Sisters began to come in, I went over to the side in front of our Blessed Mother's statue and knelt behind that part of the confessional where it sticks out a little. I didn't feel like talking and thought nobody would notice me there. Then when the Angelus rang, and all the Sisters went to supper, and the Chapel began to get kind of dark, I felt so lonesome that I went inside the altar railing as close to the statue as I could and I must have fallen asleep," she concluded, wearily. "But I'm sorry I worried you," she went on hastily. "Somehow I just didn't think."

"Never mind, darling, it is all right. Come, now, hadn't you better go to bed?" asked Mother Madeline noticing how flushed and feverish the child was. "Here is Sister with your milk."

"And I just fixed a little bit of an egg, a scrap of toast, and a wee taste of jelly to go with it; and old Sister Wilfred *would* put some of her famous cookies on the tray, so don't blame *me,*" said Sister Pierre, setting the tray on a table which Mother drew over near the child.

"Thank you so much, Sister, but really I'm not a bit hungry—just hot," declared Mary, lifting the big glass of milk in both hands and holding it against her burning cheek. "My, that feels good!"

"I warrant it tastes better, dear," and Sister Pierre busied herself fixing and coaxing till she had succeeded in getting the child to eat a few bites.

"You're all so good," murmured the little girl, tears once more welling up in the big dark eyes, "but if you don't mind, I think I'd better go to bed now."

"Yes," said Mother Madeline, "that will be the wisest thing to do," and rising, she accompanied her niece to the pretty bedroom where she assisted her to get ready for the night. Then she sat by the bedside bathing the hot little head.

"Hadn't you better sleep late in the morning dear?"

"It's Monday, Aunt Mary. The Holy Souls, you know, and I haven't heard Mass once for——"

"Of course, dear, you will want to be up for Mass. It was stupid of me to forget," Mother hastened to say.

"If I'm tired I can come back here after breakfast and stay in bed all day if you want me to."

"That depends on how you feel."

"O Auntie, if I had only made my First Communion!"

"That reminds me of something the Archbishop said Thursday. He asked your age, and told me to put you in the First Communion class next year. That will be a whole year before the regular time."

"Isn't he good!" sighed Mary. "*Isn't* he good! I see now why he said that on Commencement Day, about our Blessed Mother being truly a mother to me. I've always belonged to her, but I'll be hers more than ever now, won't I?"

"You will, indeed, dear, and you must place yourself in her care with perfect confidence that she loves you and will watch over you with a true mother's tenderness."

"I did do that this afternoon, Auntie. Oh, I wish I was one of Mr. Daniel's beautiful lilies, so I could be always before her altar."

"You can be something better than that. You can be our Lady's little lily. Dan's lovely flowers soon fade and die, but, as the days go by, you can increase in loveliness by the practice of those virtues so dear to our Blessed Mother's heart—purity, humility, obedience, charity. She was the 'Lily of Israel,' and you shall be her own little 'Lily of Maryvale'."

"You do think of such nice things, Auntie."

The religious sat silent, hoping that the child would soon go to sleep; but that blessing seemed far from the tearful eyes, which, even in the darkness, Mother Madeline could see were still wide open.

"Auntie, isn't it awfully, awfully cold down in deep, deep water?"

"Darling, *they* can't feel it. Think how happy they are with our dear Lord, and our Blessed Mother, and your father, and little brothers." The aunt was thankful for the darkness that hid her own tears from the child.

"I'll try to, Aunt Mary. And won't you please go to bed, too? I'm afraid I can't sleep right away, but I'll try very hard, only I'd feel better if I knew you weren't staying up for me."

"Very well," said Mother, kissing the little upturned face. "I shall go now to say night prayers with the Sisters, then I shall come back, and if you do not need me, I shall go to bed, too."

Half an hour later she returned and knelt by the little bed to implore the blessing of God on the sleeping child.

CHAPTER IX.

VACATION.

"Something must be done, Frank. The child needs a change. She does not complain and is so loving and grateful for the least kindness; but she never joins in the games of the few little ones who are spending the vacation here, and she is becoming so pale and wan that my heart aches for her." Thus spoke Mother Madeline one afternoon early in July.

"I have spoken to her several times about a trip of some kind, but she always pleads to remain here this summer. I am afraid it will not benefit her to take her away against her will," replied the Doctor.

"Leave that part of it to me," said his sister. "Arrange your business so you can go away for a month, at least, and Mary will be perfectly willing to accompany you. Of that I am sure. You need a trip as much as she does."

"I can be ready to go tomorrow, but I doubt very much that you will be able to accomplish *your* undertaking."

"Wait and see," said Mother.

Going to the door, she asked one of the Sisters, who was passing, to send Mary to the parlor. The child came without delay and greeted her uncle quietly, though it was evident that she was glad of the unexpected visit.

"We have just been planning a little trip for you and Uncle," began Mother Madeline.

"O Auntie, please, I'd *so* much rather stay here this summer."

The Doctor cast a look of triumph over the child's head at his sister. However, she was not to be so easily vanquished, and, confident of victory, continued, "But,

Mary, Uncle really needs a vacation, and he will not think of going away unless you accompany him."

"Then *of course* I'll go. It was selfish of me to refuse all those times Uncle asked me, but I thought he just wanted to go for my sake."

It was Mother's turn to look jubilant, and the Doctor was forced to smile at the strategy she had used to accomplish her end.

"Now," said he, "the question is, where shall we go? How about a long steamer trip up the Atlantic to some pleasant place in Canada?"

"Oh, *please no,* Uncle Frank, I couldn't bear that," answered the child in a low, strained tone.

The Doctor bit his lip in vexation at his own stupidity. Had not Mother Madeline *told* him that the child never went near the little lake on the grounds, where she had formerly spent many happy hours? In vain he tried to think of something to say, but Mary herself came to the rescue. Smiling up at him bravely through the tears she was striving to repress, she said, "But that is selfish too; so if it's best for you we will go *there.*"

"Bless you, child," exclaimed the Doctor, his own eyes getting misty, "I am only——" but a warning "ahem" from his sister caused him to catch himself in time. "I am only looking for a place where I can get a little rest, and some nice quiet spot in the mountains would suit *me* best."

"Oh, yes!" cried Mary clapping her hands, thoroughly delighted that she now had a real chance of doing something for the one she loved so much.

Her uncle and aunt thought it was the prospect of a change that had worked this wonderful transformation in the little girl hitherto so listless and sad; but a letter from the Doctor to his sister, a few weeks later, proved that such was not the case.

"I think I know just the thing," he went on. "Up in the state, a few hours ride from here, lives an elderly farmer. He has a fine old-fashioned house of his own,

and some distance from it he has built a number of log-cabins which he rents out to summer boarders. They can do their own cooking, or take their meals at the farm house, as they prefer."

"O Uncle, let's do our own. I can make coffee and biscuits and butter-scotch and fudge, and I s'pose you can cook a few things, so we'll get along in fine style."

"The coffee and biscuits will do very well, but I draw the line at butter-scotch and fudge as steady diet. I intend to take my gun along to see if I have forgotten how to use it, and if I haven't, we shall live on more substantial fare than your menu allows."

"But if you shoot chickens and things——"

"*Shoot* chickens!" The Doctor threw back his head and laughed for the first time in weeks. "Have you never seen Patrick kill chickens here?"

"No, but I've seen the Sisters fixing them in the kitchen and I know I shouldn't like that," answered Mary, turning up her nose.

"Well, when I '*shoot*' chickens, I shall also take care of the rest."

"I think you had better take your meals at the farm-house like sensible people. You will be coming back here looking like two scare-crows without a pick on your bones. Mary, how are you for clothes? Uncle wishes to start tomorrow, so you had better go ask Sister Austin if you can be ready."

"I guess dark things will be best, Auntie, don't you think? All those gingham dresses are clean, and I might take one white one to wear to Church, Sundays, and a blue woolen one in case it should turn cold."

"Yes," interrupted the Doctor, "and ask Sister to put in your jacket and heavy shoes. Then come back and report."

"As if I'd let you go without saying 'good-by' and finding out more about our preparatory enactments," said Mary.

"Our *what!*"

"*Preparatory enactments.* Now Uncle, I'm *sure* that's right."

"Well, if this is what I am to be treated to, along with butter-scotch and fudge, I'd much prefer to stay at home."

"Oh, no, no! I'll talk A B C's if you like and never mention the word 'candy'." She skipped away to obtain from Sister Austin the desired information.

The Doctor heaved a sigh of relief. "It takes yourself, Mary, to get around the child. I should never have thought of that scheme in a thousand years."

"Because you do not realize how much she thinks of you. She is very unselfish for one so young, and all you need do in future is to say that you wish thus and so, and you will see that her likes and dislikes will entirely disappear."

"It seems unkind to take advantage of the little thing, but it is for her own good. I shall have to keep away from water, though. Here she is. Well, what news?"

"Everything is ready to put in a suit-case. Now, what time do we start tomorrow?"

"I shall leave the city on that nine-thirty train, and if Auntie will let old Dan escort you to the little station here, I shall meet you and take you aboard. That is a through train, and by taking it, we shall be saved a long delay farther on."

Mary looked to Mother Madeline for her approval.

"Certainly, dear, you may see Dan tonight and make all necessary arrangements. Maybe he would ride you down to the station in his wheel-barrow," she added with a twinkle in her eyes.

"O Auntie, as if I would! That's all well enough around the garden, but *out* on the *road!* And I *do* wish you and Uncle would *please* call him *Mr.* Daniel! He always says *Miss* Mary to me and treats me with the *greatest interference.*"

"He does, does he," laughed the Doctor. "No wonder, then, that he can afford to call you *Miss* Mary."

The little girl knew she had made another blunder and privately resolved to consult the "big dic" after Uncle took his departure.

"I think I had better go look after my own wardrobe. I never know what I possess with that rascal, Tom, on the premises. 'Massa's niggah, massa's clothes,' appears to be his motto, for he thinks anything I have worn two or three times is quite old enough to be handed down to him. Come, walk with me to the gates, Mary," he said, rising and giving his hand to his sister, who stood on the porch and watched him go down the drive with the little white clad, golden-haired child, like his guardian angel, beside him.

A few weeks later, Mother Madeline received from him the following letter:

July 27, 1907.

My dear Mary:

Three weeks have slipped away since we two entered into conspiracy, and I must say it has succeeded in one way beyond my most sanguine expectations. I am an object of the greatest solicitude—in fact, you would think me in the last stages were you to see the care and attention showered on me by our small niece. I was obliged to let some of the guests into the secret, or I think they would have been scandalized at a big six-footer like me accepting the lavish ministrations of my little nurse. We have many a laugh in private over my supposed need of rest and quiet. Not that I did not need a little of both, but nothing to equal that which Mary judges is absolutely indispensable to my complete recovery—from what I never had. In spite of my warning, two or three gentlemen attempted one day to tease me at the table by remarking my paleness and lack of appetite. (I look like a boiled lobster and eat like a plow-man.) Mary bristled up, but bit her lip and said nothing. Later on, when these same gentlemen were enjoying their after-dinner smoke, and Mary thought I

had gone to the cabin for my prescribed nap, I saw her coming towards them over the grass, and wondered what was up.

"If you please, sirs, I should like to speak to you a moment. I do not want to hurt your feelings and you must pardon what I am going to say; but my uncle is here for his health and I am afraid those remarks you made at the table were very injudiciary." (Prejudicial, she meant.) "Sick folks shouldn't be told they look pale and have no appetite, you know. As the only one Uncle has to take care of him, I thought it my duty to speak to you." There was a little quaver in her voice as her courage began to ebb.

The men made profound apologies, shaking hands most gallantly with her, and she went off towards the cabin with quite an air, though I know her poor little heart was thumping like a hammer. You should have seen me making a short cut to that cabin so as to get there ahead of her, and when she arrived I was snoring lustily. She tiptoed around until she found a big palm-leaf fan; then settled herself in a rocker near my bed to keep the flies away while I slept. This, by the way, is the regular program. I felt like a big hypocrite, but what could I do? How I ever kept my face straight is a mystery to me. But I lay there like a sleeping cherub, and she fanned and fanned until she fell asleep herself. The fan dropped from her hand so I picked it up, using it for her benefit until I saw signs of her waking, when I laid it on the floor and stretched out again for fear she would catch me. If you could have seen the guilty look on her face when she realized that she had been asleep.

Now, my dear sister, this sort of thing cannot go on. The child is eaten up with anxiety and is wearing herself out for me. She has not gained an ounce. Therefore, I have taken it on myself to accept Phil Marvin's invitation for her. He is Wilhelmina's father, you know, and from Mary's accounts of that young lady's pranks and subsequent visits to your office, I judge you have more than a passing acquaintance with her. Phil

will be in New York next week and says that his wife has absolutely forbidden him to return home without Mary. For the sake of peace in the family, if nothing else, she will have to go. But all joking aside, I think it will be the very best thing for the child. There are no young folks here, nothing to divert her mind from the sad thoughts which are bound to come to all of us. I shall be glad on that account when school reopens. If you will see that her trunk is packed and sent in to the office, I will attend to the rest. If I remember rightly, those Southerners are great people for white gowns, fans, and such things; so get whatever she needs. Write her a few lines and send them to the office, because there will not be time between trains to go out to see you. We cannot get away from here before Wednesday morning, and Phil wishes to leave for home that afternoon.

I know you will feel as I do about this, and if there is not time to get her furbelows together, we can send them later.

Your devoted

Brother.

The following Tuesday afternoon when the Doctor awoke from his siesta, he again found his little nurse asleep at her post. As he lay watching her, congratulating himself on the step he had taken, he wondered how best to break the news. He finally decided to resort once more to strategy, feeling sure that therein lay his surest hope of success. So when Mary showed signs of awaking, he again closed his eyes, but not so tightly that he could not watch her every movement. Thinking him still asleep, she slipped out of the big chair and tiptoed into the next room, whence she soon returned carrying a pitcher and a glass. By this time her uncle pretended to have waked, and was seated in the chair yawning prodigiously.

"Did you have a good sleep, Uncle?"

"Splendid! Did you?"

The child looked suspiciously at him, wondering how

much he knew of the real state of affairs, but the Doctor appeared so perfectly innocent that she merely remarked, as she poured out the milk, "Nurses aren't supposed to nap while their patients are resting."

"Get another glass and drink some of that yourself. Is there any left in the pitcher?"

"Oh, yes, there's *plenty* for me," replied Mary, taking up the pitcher and again disappearing into the next room. When she returned her uncle asked, "Well, where is the milk now?"

"I drank it in there," nodding her head in the direction of the little kitchen.

"Now, miss, no more nonsense. Bring me that glass," he insisted, pausing with his own upheld before him; for he suspected that the little girl had filled his very large tumbler to the brim and saved little or none for herself.

"I had enough for now, Uncle, and later on I'll run up to the dairy and get more. Truly, I will."

"Bring me that glass."

Mary reluctantly made another trip to the kitchen, returning with a small tumbler which her uncle took and critically surveyed.

"I intended to wash it when I did yours," she hastened to explain, thinking that his look of disapproval was directed to the rim of milk still visible on the lower third of the glass.

"That is not what I am looking at," said the Doctor, proceeding to pour the milk from his glass into hers, while Mary looked on in dismay. "Now then, here's to your health," he added "and be it understood that I, Doctor Francis P. Carlton, do here and now pronounce myself a well man, no longer requiring the services of the best little nurse in the world."

"You dear old goose, you frightened me. I didn't know what was coming. But you do look fine and I am very proud of my patient, though I'm afraid I'll miss having someone to boss."

"I never felt better in my life, and I must say I never was so well taken care of and coddled since I had the measles, ages and ages ago. But *my* good times are over until next summer. Can you be ready to start for New York in the morning?"

"Tonight, if you like," she replied.

He smiled at her eagerness.

"Tomorrow will be time enough. By the way, I have accepted an invitation for you to visit Wilhelmina for a few weeks. You will like that, won't you?"

"I'd much rather go back to Maryvale, Uncle," she answered in a low tone.

"But, dear, they are so anxious to have you that Mr. Marvin has waited in New York to meet us there tomorrow and take you on with him. Mrs. Marvin told him not to dare return without you."

"They are just lovely, Uncle, but I'd rather not go unless you wish it."

"I do not want to force you, dear, but I do wish it very much. It is the first favor Phil Marvin has asked of me since we were together in college, and I hate to refuse him. He was like an elder brother to me then."

Mary sat silent for a few moments. Then came the thought, "Another chance to do something for *him.*"

"I'll go with Mr. Marvin tomorrow, Uncle; but what about my clothes?"

"I have written to Aunt Mary to attend to all that. You see, I took it all so much for granted that you would be delighted to see Wilhelmina again, that I said nothing to you about it. Suppose we get some of our traps together now. The train leaves early in the morning, and if we wait until tonight to do our packing, the light will attract no end of those pesky mosquitoes and beetles to disturb our slumbers."

So, "for Uncle's sake," the child tried to be gay, and the good man again congratulated himself on the results of his diplomacy, though underlying all was a feeling of shame at having once more taken advantage of her af-

fection for him. Only the thought that he was acting for her good kept him from telling her she was free to return to Maryvale. When finally the suitcases were packed, he turned to her saying, "How would you enjoy a stroll before supper?"

"Just as you wish, Uncle."

"But this time it must be as *you* wish. It seems to me you have very few wishes for a little girl."

"I had a big one about that milk this afternoon, but it wasn't any use."

"It takes a rogue to catch a rogue, doesn't it?" laughed the Doctor.

"By the way, Uncle, I need—let me see,—four times seven, times——dear me, I forget how much she charged a day," said Mary, puckering her forehead.

"What is it all about?" queried her uncle.

"Sick folks shouldn't ask questions of the nurse."

"But I wasn't really what you could call sick."

"Well, no," said the child, thoughtfully, "I s'pose you were a convolution."

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed the Doctor. "And I want you to know, my dear, that an operation for a dislocated jaw-bone is rarely a success, and is one from which the patient is a long time *convoluting*."

"Dislocated jaw-bone. My, that sounds fine! I must remember that and try it on Wilhelmina."

"H'm! going to turn pugilist are you?"

"Now, Uncle, you know what I mean, and if you will please give me five dollars of my very *own* money, I'll go pay a bill I owe. There will be some change."

"Where in this forsaken hole did you find an opportunity to run up a bill of five dollars?"

"O Uncle, you are so inquisitory. I arranged with Mrs. Ryder for two quarts of the *very best* milk for you, but its my treat, and that is why I want my *own* money to pay for it."

"You are a bigger fox than I thought you were. But, dearie, I haven't a penny of yours with me. Don't you think a great big fellow like me ought to be able to support just us two? I do; and for that reason your very *own* money is never touched, and I will not allow it to be touched until you are grown up. Then you may do as you please with *it*, but now you may do as you please with *mine*. Here's your 'five.'"

"Thank you, Uncle. It seems so funny, though, to be treating you on your own money. I wonder if any other girl in the whole world has an uncle like mine."

"Plenty of them have. Why, some have half a dozen."

"Half a dozen—yes, but what kind?" asked Mary scornfully.

"Clear our of here, Miss Softsoap. Go pay your lawful debts. If the bill is fifty cents, don't bring me back four silver dollars and ten nickles."

"I'll bring it in paper, every cent."

"Indeed! Remember you are not in Canada, where they use paper quarters."

"I'd hate to have to pay for the box of candy you owe me for all the teasing of the past four weeks."

"We shall be quits when I balance your vocabulary against my debts," he called after her as she ran off in the direction of the dairy.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, watching the slight form flit in and out among the trees on the hillside. "I wish we could build her up a bit. Still, she seems brighter for our few weeks here, and a month spent with Phil's lively little crowd ought to do her an immense amount of good. Wonder what she will think of eight boys. But she has had a foretaste of their antics with Wilhelmina for a companion," and whistling softly, he strode up the hill in response to the supper-horn.

The family at the farm-house kept early hours and the guests followed suit. Nine o'clock saw all lights

out. Before going to sleep, the Doctor once more weighed the pros and cons of the question, and, "It is for her own good," was his last waking thought. At the same time, in the next room, a little maid murmured drowsily, "It will make him happy." Then, perfectly contented, she fell into a dreamless sleep.

Sunrise found them in the big farm wagon, driving briskly over country roads to the station. Soon they were speeding towards New York. The Doctor noticed the little face beside him growing longer as they neared the city.

"I wish you were coming, Uncle."

"I can't go now, Mary, but I shall be there for the last week and bring you and Wilhelmina back in time for the opening of school. How will that do?"

"It's the next best thing, Uncle. I was thinking last night of what you said about some girls having lots of uncles, but you can't make me believe that there is even *one* more like you in the world. I'm glad I have only one, anyway."

"But you haven't. You have two."

"And *who* is the other one?" asked Mary, thinking he was again playing some joke.

"Your father had a brother, don't you remember? and a sister, also. They would be your Uncle Alfred and Aunt Bertha."

"Oh, yes, but they don't count. I *know* only you and Aunt Mary, so it really seems as if I have just one uncle and one aunt," she said, leaning her head against his arm and smiling up at him.

"And I, too, am well satisfied to have one niece, especially when she takes such good care of this poor old chap."

"No, no, Uncle, you don't mean *that! I'm* not glad to be the only niece, I can tell you," vehemently protested Mary, looking out the car window and winking very hard.

"Confound my stupidity," muttered the Doctor. "Will I ever learn to use any tact!" Putting his arm around the child he drew her close to him, saying, "You misunderstood me, darling. What I mean is that if I had a thousand nieces you would still be first with me. We are such good chums, you know," he added, playfully.

"I ought to have better sense, I guess, but O Uncle! I *do* miss mother and the babies. I just can't help it."

"Of course you can't, and we do not expect you to; for though Aunt Mary and I would do everything possible to prove how dear you are to us, we can never supply your mother's place. We only wish you not to grieve too much, for that would do her no good and you much harm."

"I see now what you mean, Uncle," lapsing again into silence. After some minutes she asked, "What is Mr. Marvin like, Uncle?"

"Very like Wilhelmina. He is taller than I am and wears a beard."

"Where are we to meet him?"

"At my apartments. I insisted that he should consider them his own while in the city."

"That was nice, but then you always do nice things."

"I haven't any small change at present, my dear."

"Why, did you want to buy peanuts or something? I don't care for anything unless you do."

"H'm," said Uncle looking at her closely, but seeing she was in earnest, he added, "I hope Aunt Mandy and Liza took good care of Phil, and that Tom took him to drive about the city as I directed. He is determined to start for home this afternoon so that I will not be able to show him around."

By this time they had reached Jersey City where they took the ferry and soon landed in New York. Tom met them, and as they drove through town, Uncle ordered him to stop at Huyler's.

"Come in, now, and select what you like best," he said to Mary.

"As if you didn't know," she replied, and while she was busy making her choice, he too seemed very much engaged. When they emerged from the store, Mary laughed heartily at the immense box he carried.

"I never knew *you* had such a sweet tooth," she remarked.

"You surely do not think I bought this for myself. It is going into your trunk for those young Marvins, and you will enjoy seeing them make it disappear, I warrant. 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' will be nothing compared to the raid they will make."

As the carriage stopped at the Doctor's apartments, a gentleman ran down the steps, threw open the carriage door, seized the Doctor by both hands, and literally dragged him out on the sidewalk. Mary sat back, greatly enjoying the meeting between *those two, great, big boys,* as she afterwards called them when writing to her aunt. They shook hands, and they shook hands again, and they clapped each other on the back, until such expressions as, "Frank, old boy, how are you?" and "Phil, old chap, I am delighted to see you!" caused the passers-by to smile good-naturedly, while Tom could not repress a snicker, and Mary laughed outright, clapping her hands gleefully.

"Oh, I quite forgot *you,*" and that *biggest man I ever saw* reached in and lifted her bodily out of the carriage.

"So," said he as he set her down on the pavement and held her at arm's length, surveying her from under the bushy black brows that would have frightened her were it not for the twinkle in the dark eyes beneath, "so this is the Mary about whom we have been hearing all these weeks. My little Willie will be beside herself with joy when she sees the surprise I have for her."

"Oh, doesn't she know I'm coming?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Come into the house," said the Doctor, "We are creating a sensation out here. And Tom," turning to that worthy whose face was one wide grin, "one-thirty, mind."

"Yas suh, Marse Frank, yas *suh!*"

The three went up the steps into the house, Mr. Marvin still holding Mary's hand in his right, while his left arm was thrown about the Doctor's shoulder. Aunt Mandy, bobbing and courtesying, came to meet them, while Liza's smiling face appeared in the background.

"Now, Liza, we ought to have dinner at twelve. Auntie, will you help Mary put the things that are in this suit-case into her trunk? that is, whatever you think she should take. Carry your small suit-case, Mary, with only what you need on the train. And Auntie, will there be room for this?" he asked, pointing to the box.

"I'll see, Marse Frank honey, I sho will," she replied, leaving the room.

"If there is any danger of crushing her finery, don't mind it," he called after her. "I can send it by express. You had better see if she has all you want in the trunk, Mary," he continued, as he and Mr. Marvin settled themselves for a chat. "It seems a shame, Phil, to have you run away like this," he began.

"I suppose it does, Frank," replied the older man, "but I have been North now for two weeks, and I dislike being away for so much of the vacation. You see, the older boys and Willie are off at school all year, so I wish to see all I can of them while they are home."

"Well, never mind. I have promised Mary to go after her, and bring her and Wilhelmina back to school. Then you and I can make up for this short visit. Here is Liza to call us to dinner, and we shall have a smoke later on."

"My, how those two talked!" wrote Mary to Mother Madeline. "They hardly took time to eat until I told

Uncle I feared a *relax* for him. I was nearly starved, for we had had our breakfast about five o'clock."

Promptly at half-past one, Tom appeared at the door and drove them to the station. When it was nearly time for the train to pull out, the Doctor left the sleeper and stood on the platform where he could talk to them through the window.

"O Uncle, *please* send me some stamps. I have only four or five and they will never do for all the letters I am going to write you."

"Hear that, Phil! that is one on the Sunny South. She thinks she can't buy even a postage stamp down there. Ha, ha!"

"And Uncle *dear, will* you write to me?"

"Every day, sweetheart. I shall stop on my way home to lay in a supply of writing material *and* postage stamps. Ha, ha, ha, Phil! That is an awful one."

"Wait until I get *you* down there, old chap," retorted Mr. Marvin.

"And Uncle, I left all necessary directions with Tom——"

"For what, pray?"

"Why, how to take care of you and not let you get a relax—"

"The mischief you did," exclaimed the Doctor. It was now Mr. Marvin's turn to laugh at the look of dismay on his friend's face. "You mean to say you have put that black rascal up to dogging my steps for a solid month? Now, see here, young lady, I discharged you as nurse yesterday afternoon, and until I engage you again—"

"I'll write now to Tom and *countrymand* all the orders I gave him, and mail it at the next station."

"Well, that is more like it. Time's up!" he exclaimed, and jumping on a trunk, he lovingly embraced the child through the window. Locking both hands tightly around his neck, she whispered, "Do, *please,* take

care of yourself, Uncle. You and Auntie are all I've got now," and she tried to smile through the tears that would come in spite of her efforts to be brave and cheerful.

"I will, darling, I truly will. Quick pet, the train is moving. We will be injured if we are not careful." Jumping off the trunk, he ran along beside the train as it slowly pulled out, talking cheerily to her until he came to the end of the platform, where he stood waving his handkerchief until he knew she could no longer see it.

"It's the very first time I ever went away without him," she tried to explain to Mr. Marvin, as she dried her tears. "We're such great, great chums. you know."

"Yes, Willie has told me all about you both, and *I* think you are a very brave little girl, indeed. Catch Willie doing a thing like this."

"Oh, but she comes away from *you* and her *mother,* and stays months and months; and you see, no matter how much I love Uncle, he can *never* be what mother was," she said sadly.

"Yes, I guess Willie has a good deal of grit; otherwise, she would have no peace with those brothers of hers. Can you play baseball?" he inquired, anxious to divert her mind from dangerous subjects.

"I never tried, but I'd like to learn."

"Let me see," he said, taking her hands in his big palms. "Pretty frail for anything so strenuous. They must give you easy balls until these get stronger. Did you ever ride horse-back?"

"Oh yes, and I dearly love it. I missed it so much at the farm, but they had no saddle-horses."

"We have some fair ponies and very fine roads, so you will have one means of enjoying yourself."

"I'm sure there will be ever so many ways of doing that, with so many to play with. Wilhelmina has told me all their names, and ages, and for whom they are named, and everything. You see, at school we were so

much together that we had plenty of time to learn everything about each other."

"Indeed! but I'll wager you can't name that brood of mine without making a mistake."

"I think I can. First, there's Phil. He is named after you and is fifteen. Then Harry, after his mother. Wilhelmina said her name is Henrietta. He's thirteen and loves books. I'll like *him*. Joe is next, named for your father. He's eleven. Then Wilhelmina, called after her aunt. Next, the twins, seven years old, and named after father and Uncle Frank. Let me see," counting on her fingers, "that's six, isn't it? Then comes Fred, five years old; and Dick, three; and the baby, Jack, not a year. They are named for uncles. I know I'll love them," she continued, pulling out her locket from inside the neck of her dress. "Those were our babies," she said in a low tone. "I don't show them to many, but I want you to see them."

"Your father sent me larger pictures just like these. You are very like your mother in appearance. God grant you may resemble her in every way; she was a beautiful character. Did your uncle ever tell you how he and I were at college together, and how I spent the short vacations at his home?"

"He told me some about it, but I'd like to hear more, please."

"Well, he and your father and I were the best of friends, though he was much younger than either of us. We could not leave our homes immediately on finishing our preparatory course. My father died when I was young, and, being the eldest of the family, I had to look after the old place until my brother Fred was of an age to shoulder the burden. It was much the same with your father. His mother was an invalid, and knowing she could not live many years, he deferred his college course until after her death. We met for the first time on the train bound for New York, and by the time we reached that city, we had become fast friends. Your uncle was the youngest man in our class, and

seemed almost a boy to us old fellows; nevertheless, he was a great favorite, and I always attributed your father's conversion to his example. But really, I am forgetting my manners. It is so long since I traveled with a young lady. I believe it is the proper thing to provide her with candy and something to read."

"I *have* a most be-yew-tee-ful box of candy in my suit-case, and I never thought of it."

Down the child got on her knees and began tugging at the straps.

"Allow me," said Mr. Marvin gallantly. In a moment he had the suit-case opened on the seat before her.

"Thank you. I do hope you like candy. Uncle does."

"I have reason to remember his fondness for it," laughed Mr. Marvin. "One of our biggest college scrapes originated in an innocent box of candy. I must tell you about it some day."

"Do, please. I love to hear about scrapes, but I never seem to get into any bad ones myself. Poor Wilhelmina does, though, lots of them. Don't you like caramels? Wilhelmina and I think they are the most economonickle kind of candy. They are so chewy that they last a long time. Dear me! I never wrote that letter to Tom. I'd better do it right now. If you care to go smoke, I don't mind being left alone. Uncle always goes."

"I believe I shall, and if your letter is finished when I return, I shall mail it at the next station. Have you noticed how few stops we are making? This is a very fast train. Perhaps after you write your letter you may like to take a siesta. I shall have the porter bring some pillows and you can lie down here on the seat for awhile."

"Thank you, Mr. Marvin. It does seem a long, long time since I got up this morning. It is going to be hard work writing this. Everything wobbles so. However, if Tom can't make it out, Uncle will be only too glad to help him."

So she scratched away for some time, and then paused with an anxious pucker on her brow. How should she sign herself? She had never written to anyone but her mother, her uncle, and her aunt, and to them she was always "Your loving Mary." After giving the matter due consideration, she decided that this was a case which called for "Yours respectably, Mary Selwyn," and thus she concluded her letter. When she had addressed and stamped the envelope, she slipped it under one of the straps of the suit-case where Mr. Marvin would be sure to see it. Then she curled herself up on the seat, where a half-hour later he found her asleep. Having disposed of her letter, he settled himself in the opposite section to read his paper. Now and then he looked across the aisle and chuckled as he thought of his little daughter's surprise and delight when she would see what he had brought her from New York. A sudden slackening of speed and a jolt or two finally aroused the little girl. Mr. Marvin again took his place beside her, remarking, "You look the better for your little rest."

"Have I been asleep long? I don't like to go to sleep on a train for fear I may miss something that I ought to see."

"We passed Trenton a while ago, but no doubt you have been there before."

"Uncle and I traveled over this road as far as Baltimore, two years ago. When will we get to Philadelphia?"

"About five o'clock. Have you ever visited that city?"

"Yes, Mr. Marvin, with Uncle. He took me to Independence Hall, the Mint, and ever so many interesting places. It makes history and joggerfy easier when you really see things."

"You have had the advantage of Willie in that way. She has traveled very little. I have taken the older boys

about some, but it seems to me the younger children are better off with their mother."

"After you went to smoke, I was thinking about tennis. Have you a court?"

"Yes, indeed, the boys have fixed up a very good one. But don't you find a racket pretty heavy?"

"An ordinary one, yes; but you see Uncle had a racket with a very light frame made for me, so I have no trouble at all."

"Have you ever taken part in private theatricals?"

"We are all in the plays at school, but I never have any special part. I am not much of an electrocutionist. My voice doesn't carry far enough for the big hall."

"H'm, I see," said Mr. Marvin, coughing behind his paper to hide his amusement. "Well, you will have a chance to shine now, for my little folks enjoy nothing so much as getting up a play. They have a big room in the top of the house fitted up for a theater, with a nice little stage and a curtain painted by Harry. The latter is very realistic, I must admit. The scene is taken from early American history and represents a band of Indians scalping the inhabitants of a little village, which is in flames. It is truly vivid. The boys will be delighted to have you for the heroine. Wilhelmina, being the only girl, is very much in demand and sometimes has to take several parts in one play, for the boys absolutely refuse to wear petticoats no matter how urgent the case may be. Sometimes they inveigle their mother and me into acting parts, but we old folks prefer to sit in the audience."

"It must be grand!" exclaimed Mary, her eyes glistening. "I hope they will have one while I'm there."

"Suppose we practice one to have when your uncle comes down. We shall all take part, and some of the neighbors can be invited so he will not be lonely in the audience."

"And have it a surprise to him? Oh, that will be fine!" cried the child, clapping her hands.

At Philadelphia where there was a delay of fifteen minutes, Mary seized the opportunity to write the following:

Dear, dear Uncle,—Just a teeny, weeny line here at Philadelphia, where the train has stopped for a quarter of an hour. Mr. Marvin said we had better get off for a little exercise. I am writing this in the station. He is grand to me and tells me lots of things just like you do when we are traveling. He is waiting for me now to walk around a little with him. Lots and lots of love from Your own Mary.

It was late the following afternoon when the train reached Waverly, the station nearest Mr. Marvin's home. As he and his little companion made their way down the aisle to the door, the latter exclaimed, "Why, the circus must be here! Do look at that wagon. Isn't it funny?"

"Yes, that is the 'Marvin Circus Wagon'—in plain language, our family wagonette, fixed up in honor of my home-coming. There is no telling how it would look had they known you would accompany me."

Mary took another look at the gaily decorated vehicle. It was draped with red, white, and blue bunting, even the reins and the spokes of the wheels being wrapped with that material. Immense sun-flowers were fastened to every available spot, and peering over the side was a row of eager little faces. Wilhelmina, whose place was with Phil in front, stood up on the seat as the train came to a stop.

"There he is, there he is!" she cried. "Oh, I wish I had gone with Harry and Joe." Then catching sight of Mary, she uttered a scream of delight, leaped from the seat to the rim of the wheel, jumped lightly to the ground, and was off up the platform before Phil could realize what had happened.

"Oh, you dearest, darlingest daddy," she exclaimed, throwing her arms about her father and then almost smothering Mary in a joyful embrace. "If this isn't

the grandest surprise! It's better than all the presents in all the stores of New York. No wonder mother wouldn't let me into the room next to mine. She was getting it ready for Mary."

"I knew I could not bring you anything you would like better," laughed her father.

"If you will give me the checks, father," said Harry, "Joe and I will see that Sam gets the right trunks. He has the wagon down yonder."

"Very well, my boy, and I shall escort the ladies to the—well, what have you named your wonderful conveyance? Mary thought it was a circus wagon."

"Did she?" cried Wilhelmina. "Oh, I'm so glad it looks like one. I just love circuses. We were getting up a grand one to surprise you, father, and I practiced riding Dixie standing up on his back until I could do it fine, and this morning I gave a dress rehearsal. My fairy dress, you know, Mary, was just the thing to wear, and everything was grand until Jinny saw me and ran and told mother, and then I had to promise never to do it again." She sighed deeply and continued, "It's been the height of my ambition to be able to ride standing up."

"Indeed!" exclaimed her father. "I wonder what those good ladies who taught you all year would say to such noble sentiments."

Wilhelmina hung her head, glad that they had reached the wagonette, where further conversation was rendered impossible on account of the noisy greetings from its occupants.

"Sit by me, father, sit by me!"

"I'm the littleth here, and——"

"Oh, that doesn't count now, Fred. 'Little folks should be——' "

"Let's take turns. A mile apiece."

"Boys, boys, you will frighten the ladies. Be quiet until I introduce you properly."

Soon all were comfortably settled, and when Harry and Joe had joined them, Phil turned the horses towards home.

"There's a new calf, father."

"And loths and loths of little chickenths."

"And the brown colt broke his leg, and the horse doctor came," added Wilhelmina. "Phil called him a 'vegetable sturgeon.'"

"Aw, I never did either," from the front seat; but the protest was lost on the little girl, who now proceeded to give all her attention to her guest. In spite of her incessant chatter, Mary could not help noticing the twins who sat at the far end of the opposite seat. There was much mysterious whispering and nudging going on between them, and finally Bob leaned over and said something to Fred whose face lit up in a wonderful manner. Then in his drawling lisp the latter began, "Fawthah, whath the mathah with your pocketh?"

"No reflections on this suit, young man, or you will hurt Mary's feelings. She knows it is the latest of New York styles."

"Oh, the thuit ith juth lovely, but thoth pocketh 'll be all out of shape. Mothah never leths uth put lumpy things in the pocketh of our beth thuiths, doth she boyths?" and the little fellow turned to his brothers to have his speech verified.

"You're right, she doesn't Freddie."

"Well," laughed their father, beginning to take from his pockets the various small knobby packages which had so worried Fred, "you may as well have them now as later."

The boys received their gifts with loud exclamations of delight.

"It takes father to get a fellow the right thing," said Phil to Harry, now his companion on the front seat.

"Yes, I think he never quite got over being a boy himself."

After a half-hour's drive along a beautiful country road, Phil stopped the horses before a pair of great iron gates and waited until they were opened by the blackest black boy Mary had ever seen.

"Caught napping, eh, Wash?"

"No *sah!* Marse Marvin, no *sah!* I jes' stepped in thar to git ma knife," protested the lad, jerking his thumb in the direction of a small stone house inside the gates. "I'se powahful glad to see yo' back, Massa."

"Thank you, Wash, I am delighted to get home again and to see the place looking so well."

The boy showed his delight at the words of praise by turning hand-springs on the grass after the wagonette had rolled on up the broad avenue.

"That was George Washington Johnson, whose duty it is to attend to the gates and keep the grounds about them in order. He lives with his mother in the lodge there," explained Mr. Marvin to Mary.

"Don't the darkies have funny names? Tom, the boy who cleans Uncle's office, is Thomas Jefferson Fauntleroy."

"Wait till you hear *some* of the names around here," said Frank. "Those others are mild compared to them."

"There's Jinny with the babies, father."

Mr. Marvin turned to wave to his two youngest, who, in charge of their colored nurse, were playing under the trees.

"You don't mean to say all this is your front yard, Wilhelmina," exclaimed Mary, looking about her in search of the house.

"I s'pose that's what you'd call it, but we don't think of it exactly that way. You see, this place belonged to our great, great grandfather, or some relation like that, and it's what you call a plantation. It was bigger then than it is now, but grandfather sold part of it."

At this point the drive-way turned, and through the

trees Mary caught glimpses of a big white house with wide verandas upstairs and down. A few moments later, Phil drew up with a flourish before the broad stone steps down which Mrs. Marvin was hastening to welcome the travelers. Her words of greeting were lost in the babel of voices which ensued.

"Look, mother, isn't this fine?" "See what father brought *me!*" "This is the best of all, mother," until she finally extricated herself from the noisy crowd and took possession of Mary saying, "Dinner will be ready in half an hour. In the meantime we shall go upstairs and remove some of the travel stains. Father, Mr. Carrol is waiting to see you in the library."

As they turned to ascend the steps, Mary noticed that the house, though a two-story one like most southern homes, was much broader across the front than any she had seen. She expected to enter a fine, wide hall, and could not repress a little exclamation of astonishment when she stepped into what seemed to be an immense room two stories high, occupying the center of the house. Opening off it at the right and left were several large rooms, and half way up, around its wall, ran a gallery, on which opened the doors of the rooms on the second floor. A broad stair-case of dark, highly polished wood stretched away towards the wall opposite the front door until it reached a landing from which two slightly narrower flights ascended, right and left, to the gallery above.

"This isn't much like New York sky-scrapers, is it?" laughed Wilhelmina. "Here, we have room to spread out, and *there* it seems as if there's space only up in the air."

By this time they had reached the gallery, and passing around it towards the front of the house, they paused while Mrs. Marvin took a key from her pocket, saying, "We do not waste much time here locking doors, but I was so afraid that Wilhelmina would discover our secret that I turned the key in this one."

"I'm just dying to see what you've been doing in here the past day or two, mother. I might have known that there was something up. Oh!" as the door swung open, "you made it blue for Mary."

"Now, little daughter, you will give Mary the idea that I have done great work in here when I have only changed the things on the dresser, put blue ribbons on the curtains, and given a touch here and there. But come," turning to Mary, "you look so tired. A good bath will make you feel better. In the meantime, I shall get some of the things out of your trunk. Have you the key?"

"Is my trunk here already?" asked the child in surprise. "Aunt Mandy put a clean dress in my suitcase—just a white linen one that wouldn't crumple easily—but there are thinner ones in the trunk. Why, at home we would consider it wonderful if we got our trunks the same night."

"Sam would be disgraced if he did not have the guest's trunk in her room before she reached it. He knows a short way from the station. It is well enough for trunks, but I prefer the longer drive."

The little girl's simple toilet was soon completed, and the three descended the stairs just as the dinner gong sounded. The evening shadows were fast filling the great hall, but a ray of the setting sun, slanting across the stairway, lighted up Mary's face and hair so that three-year-old Richard ran to his father, crying, "Daddy, dey's a angel tummin' down tairs wif muddie an' Willie!"

Mr. Marvin laughed and led the little fellow back to the hall.

"Oo *is* a angel, isn't 'oo, like the picser over my bed?"

Mary knelt and put her arms around the child, saying, "Why no, I'm just a girl like Wilhelmina. What makes you think I'm an angel?"

"Oo's dot shiny hair an' a white dess, but 'oo hasn't

any wings; so I is 'fwaid 'oo isn't a angel at all," he declared, turning away with a disappointed air.

"But if I were an angel I couldn't play with you as I mean to do. Won't you take me to see the baby?"

"He's afleep now. Dinny put him to bed. He isn't big nuff to 'tay up for dinner wif daddy, but I *is*," and Richard, better known as Dick, drew himself up proudly and returned to his father's side. Mr. Marvin swung him up to his shoulder, and taking Fred's hand, led the way to the dining room.

"We do not usually have dinner so late," said Mrs. Marvin to Mary, "but the children begged to wait for father tonight. I prefer early hours for little folks."

"De little folkses am all in bed," piped Dick from his high chair near his mother at the end of the table. Mr. Marvin sat at the head with the little girls at his right and left, Harry next to Mary, Phil opposite, the twins next to him, and Joe and Fred below Harry. The boys were unusually quiet while the serving was being done, so that Lyda, the maid, remarked to old Aunt Chloe in the kitchen, "It war powahful wise ob Massa to fotch dat li'l gal heah." But by degrees their tongues were loosened and the fun began.

"Mary looks like a white dove among a flock of blackbirds," remarked Mr. Marvin; for with the exception of Harry, who had his mother's fair skin and auburn hair, all the little Marvins were black-haired like their father, and brown as Indians.

"You forget, father, we have one rooster," said Bob with a significant glance at Harry's head.

"Why, I think Harry's hair is a beautiful color!" exclaimed Mary. "Uncle's must have been like that when he was young, wasn't it, Mr. Marvin? Of course it is darker now and there is lots of gray in it since—since—" but a howl from the opposite side of the table diverted her mind from the sad subject, and she turned quickly to see Bob hopping about on one foot holding on to his injured shin.

"Robert! what is the trouble?" demanded his mother; but "no tattling" was the motto of these boys, and Bob sheepishly took his seat, muttering something about wishing folks would keep the dogs in the barn.

"You are not bitten, are you, son?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Marvin.

"Oh no, mother, it's all right now," but when her attention was given to Dick, Bob shook his fist at Harry who was innocently plying his knife and fork, seemingly unconscious of the many pairs of merry black eyes fixed upon him.

"A barked shin is sometimes more painful than a bitten one, isn't it, my boy?" laughed his father.

"Have you many dogs, Mr. Marvin?" asked Mary, devoutly hoping he had not.

"I say," interrupted Frank, "*we* all call the Doctor, 'Uncle Frank,' and I don't see why Mary can't call you and mother, 'Aunt Phil' and 'Uncle Etta.' Aw!" as a shout arose, "you all know what I mean."

"Certainly, Mary may do as she likes, but I should prefer 'Uncle Phil,' if you please."

"Oh, may I call you that?" Then hesitating a moment, she added, "But I don't know, for you see it could never mean quite the same as 'Uncle Frank.' Still, if you wouldn't mind——"

"Bless your heart, child! Frank only means that *Mrs.* and *Mr.* sound too formal, and it would be more like home for you to say *aunt* and *uncle.*"

"*I* want to say sumfin," announced Dick, rapping with his spoon on the table to silence the noisy chatter about him. "Oo all is makin' so much noise."

"Well, Dick, we are listening now, so proceed."

"I don't want to 'ceed! I want to ask *her,*" aiming the spoon at Mary, "to tum wif me to see my billy-doat. Will 'oo?"

"Not tonight, dear," interposed his mother. "Mary has been on the train since yesterday and is very tired.

Besides, it is too dark; but she will go with you tomorrow after breakfast.''

''I say!'' cried Joe, ''Now we have a real white woman for 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West!' Willie is as brown as an Indian, but Mary can ride in the goat-cart, that's the stage-coach, with Dick. He'll be her little boy.''

''I'll do the scalping,'' declared Bob. ''It will be worth while scalping *her.*''

''What about General Custer and his troops?'' demanded Harry, loyal to the late admirer of his auburn locks, who looked rather alarmed at the fate in store for her. ''I wonder where you braves will be after we take a few cracks at you.''

''I think it would be advisable to play some milder games with the girls,'' remonstrated Mr. Marvin. ''I have a fine prize for a tennis tournament which is to begin the day after tomorrow; so be prepared.''

''And the pony for Mary is in good condition, father,'' said Phil, who had shared his mother's secret. ''I brought him up from the big pasture this morning.''

''We will go for a ride before breakfast tomorrow, Mary,'' declared Wilhelmina, enthusiastically.

''If you manage to get in a ride before breakfast, Sis,'' laughed Harry, ''I'll give you my new knife with the cork-screw in it.''

''Muddie,'' demanded Dick, in a whisper that could be heard all over the room, ''why tan't Willie have goldy turls like Mary?''

''Don't you like Willie's curls? They are just like yours.''

''Willie's hair always reminds me of Jinny's—so black and kinky,'' observed Bob to his twin in an undertone intended, however, for his sister's ears.

That she caught the remark and took it to heart, too, was proved by an event of the following morning.

Dinner over, the family repaired to the veranda. As she passed through the hall at Mrs. Marvin's side, Mary

could not avoid hearing the conversation which was carried on in a low tone behind her. Wilhelmina had purposely waited until Fred caught up with her.

"I don't think it was very polite of you, Freddie, to come to dinner with my comp'ny without ever washing your hands," she began in an aggrieved tone.

"I did wath 'em," stoutly declared Fred. "That's juth shadowth what you thee on 'em. I'th scrubbed 'em with a bruth. That ain't dirth—ith juth from playin' ball an' it won't wath off."

"You don't scrub hard enough, and I just know she's mortally insulted."

Fred paused under the light to examine his chubby palms; then asked anxiously, "I thay, Willie, you don't think she notithed 'em, honeth, do you?"

"Well, I don't know," was the answer in a mollified tone, as his sister saw her lecture had produced some effect.

"Don't thay anything, Willie, pleathe, an' I'll go to Tham in the mornin' an' askth him for thome of that what he cleanth the harneth with. Maybe that'll take it off."

"Mercy, child! Don't you dare. You'll poison yourself. Just use lots and lots of soap and hot water and let 'em soak awhile."

"All right, but don't tell *her*."

"We must let you go to bed early tonight, Mary. I am sure you are very tired," said Mrs. Marvin, when all were comfortably settled on the wide airy porch.

"I feel rested already. It doesn't tire me much to travel, especially when I have someone to point out interesting things, as Uncle Phil did," looking up shyly as she used the new name for the first time.

"That sounds first rate, doesn't it mother?" asked Harry.

"It does, indeed. Did father tell you that Uncle Frank is coming down in a few weeks?"

"They did not give me a chance," declared Mr. Marvin, trying to make himself heard above the acclamations with which the joyful news was received.

"Oh, won't that be jolly! We must plan all sorts of things for his visit," cried Phil, who with the older boys had the greatest admiration for the Doctor.

"Get your banjo, Phil, and let us have some music," said his father, and a pleasant hour was spent, singing the minstrel songs so dear to the southern heart.

"Father must hear you play tomorrow, Mary," said Wilhelmina, "but I'll have to hide my head forever after."

"But you have taken lessons only a little while," urged Mary, "while I have taken for over two years."

"And you *love* to practice, while I do *not*."

' 'I should think you would like to play for the boys to sing. That is what I want to do for Uncle. I can play several songs for him now, but he sings some that he has no music for, so he plays his own accompaniment for those. His favorite goes like this," and quite simply she sang,

" 'Thou'rt like unto a flower,
As fair, as pure, as bright,
I gaze on thee and sadness
Steals o'er my heart's delight,
I long on those golden tresses
My folded hands to lay,
Praying that Heav'n may preserve thee
So fair, so pure alway.'

He always puts his heart and soul into it, and I know he's thinking of someone, but I've never been able to find out who it is."

"Why don't you ask him?" inquired Mr. Marvin, smiling in the darkness.

"Oh! I coax him to tell me every time he sings it; but he only asks me if I'm not the least bit jealous, and then he laughs and sings, 'Mary Had a Little Lamb,' or something else just as silly to tease me. Of course

I'm not jealous, but I should love to know that person. She must be very beautiful and good. Uncle Phil, maybe you could help me to guess. You must have known many of Uncle's friends when you were younger. Have you any idea who it is?"

"I have a very good idea, indeed," laughed Mr. Marvin.

"And so have I," echoed his wife.

"And I!" "And I!" cried Phil and Harry.

"Isn't that strange! You all know who it is and I can't even guess. But perhaps it is someone who lives near here. Do you think I'll see her?"

"Without the slightest doubt, you will see her many times."

"Why! you have——" but a firm hand covering his mouth and the following from Wilhelmina put a timely end to Harry's disclosure.

"It always seems to me the silliest thing to say a person is like a flower. I think the American Beauty is the finest flower there is, but I certainly shouldn't care to look like one. Just imagine hair that color red! Some shades, like mother's, are just beautiful; but not the American Beauty color. And think of such a complexion! And a body only as big around as the stem, and leaves for hands, and roots for feet! No, I can't see how anyone can look 'like unto a flower.' There's a picture of some great musician hanging in the room at school where I practice, and his hair does remind me of a chrysanthemum. You know, Mary. His name begins with P-a-d-e-, but I could never pronounce the rest, so I just called him Paddy for short. Of course, pansies look like faces, though they are more like cats with little whiskers. But the colors of them! Still, I read of a man who got purple with rage, so maybe he did look like a purple pansy. Then the pale yellow or cream-colored ones might do for those people whose hair and face are all the same color. Even their eyes are a yellowish green. But *excuse me!* Don't ever tell *me* that I'm

'like unto a flower' unless you wish to hurt my feelings."

"No danger that anyone will ever say such a thing about you, Sis. The wildest flower that grows is tame compared to you," declared Harry.

"But Wilhelmina," urged Mary, "the song doesn't mean that people *look* like flowers, but that they remind us of them in some way. I'll tell you how they do, some time."

"I fear Willie has little of the poet in her, Mary," laughed Mr. Marvin.

"Why father," protested Wilhelmina, "I just love poetry—that is, *some* kinds, like *Paul Revere's Ride* and *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.* Something with lots of dash and go to it. It's one of the greatest disappointments of my life that I didn't live when there were Indians all around this part of the country, or even at the time of the Civil War, so I could have jumped on Dixie and gone tearing around to warn the people that the Indians or the Yankees were coming, and——oh! excuse me, Mary, I forgot that you are from New York."

"That's all right, Wilhelmina. You haven't hurt my feelings a bit. I'm half a Southerner myself, you know. Father's people always lived in Virginia. But never you mind. I just know that some fine day you will do something grand and brave to make us all proud of you. It doesn't always need Indians nor Yankees for folks to do brave things. Sometimes there is a flood, or a fire, or something, and then people show what kind of stuff they are made of. But dear me, I hope I'll never be in anything like that. I am such a coward. Why! a beetle is enough to make me run most a mile, and if I ever saw a snake!! Well, I really don't know what I would do. Do you remember the night the bat got into the study-hall, Wilhelmina? I certainly disgraced myself, that time."

"Well, so did everyone else. You were not the only one that screamed and jumped around."

"And you were just as cool as could be, and chased it out as if it had been a fly. Oh, you'll do something grand some day, Wilhelmina, and perhaps by that time I'll be able to write a poem about *you.*"

"And I shall set it to music," laughed Phil, as he commenced another song.

"Why don't you learn to play some of Phil's songs on the piano, Wilhelmina?" inquired Mary, when the voices had died away. "Uncle and I play a good many together since I found his banjo."

"Many a lively evening he gave us with that same banjo when we were at College," said Mr. Marvin. "Some of the boys had splendid voices, and we used to make the old rafters ring."

"I'd just love to play with Phil," declared Wilhelmina, "but Sister Dominic won't teach me the things I like. I could play *The Wearing of the Green* just fine, before I took lessons at all."

"Huh!" from Joe. "Nobody could sing it 'just fine' when you played it. You used to hum the notes that you couldn't find right away."

"I'll play it for you tomorrow, to prove it," insisted his sister.

"In order to accomplish all you have planned for tomorrow, little daughter, you had better retire at once. Come," said her mother, "the sandman is already busy."

"I wathn't athleep," protested Fred, as she lifted him in her arms.

"You snored," declared Frank.

"It wath the breethe blowin' in the treeth," he called back as he was borne away.

Mary, remembering Wilhelmina's recent lecture, patted the chubby hand which hung over Mrs. Marvin's shoulder.

"Will you show me your guinea-pigs, tomorrow, Freddie?"

"Thure, I will," came the drowsy murmur, though

at the same time the little fist was tightly doubled up to hide "the shadowth."

"My room is right next to yours," said Wilhelmina. "See, we can leave the door between them open. They are just alike—size, shape, furniture, everything, except you have blue where I have pink. Down stairs, this part of the house is like a great big bay window, but up here they made two rooms of it. The house faces south, so no matter how hot it is, we who sleep on this side always get a breeze at night."

"It's all lovely—everything and everybody. I thought I'd be afraid of so many boys, but I'm not a bit. And Mr. and—I mean Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta couldn't be kinder if they tried."

"I'm so glad you like it. You can't imagine how happy it makes me to have you here. But come, mother will be in as soon as she puts Fred to bed. I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's put on our kimonas and I will come in here. We can talk while we are brushing our hair."

Thus Mrs. Marvin found them.

"Not in bed yet? If you try to tell Mary everything tonight, Wilhelmina, you will have nothing left to talk about during her visit."

"Mother, we have a secret already. I think, Mary, we had better tell mother and keep it a secret from father. Next year," turning again to her mother, "I intend to practice and practice, and Mary is going to ask Sister Dominic to let us learn duets together. You can play Mary's part when I come home. Just imagine you or Mary playing with *me*."

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure. You secret is indeed a lovely one."

"It was Mary's idea. I'd never have thought of it in a hundred years."

"I hope you will adopt a great many more of Mary's ideas, especially if they are as excellent as this one. Run off to bed now, and I shall go down to father for

a while," and kissing the two little girls good-night, she went to join her husband on the porch.

An hour later, on her way to bed, she stopped in her little daughter's room, and finding Wilhelmina asleep, tiptoed across to the door of the adjoining one. She was turning away, satisfied that Mary, too, was in the land of dreams, when a muffled sound caused her to pause and listen. Entering the room, she softly closed the door behind her, and going quickly to the bed, pulled aside the pillows beneath which Mary was striving to smother her sobs.

"My dear, dear child, what is the matter? What has happened to make you so unhappy?" Kneeling beside the bed, she put her arms tenderly about the little girl. Then, as Mary clung to her without answering, she continued, "Has Wilhelmina said anything to hurt you, darling? She is sometimes thoughtless, but I have never found her intentionally unkind."

"No, no!" sobbed the child. "It's because—you are all—so kind that—it—makes me—remember things. Oh!—I want my mother!"

"I know, darling, I know," said Mrs. Marvin soothingly, and with loving words she strove to quiet her. By degrees Mary grew calmer.

"It's over now," she said with a long sigh. "I didn't think anyone would hear me; but sometimes the feeling gets so strong I just can't help having a good cry."

"I am afraid you are quite worn out—more so than you realize. I shall stay with you for a little while," declared Mrs. Marvin, drawing a low chair to the bedside. A step in the hall caught her attention. "Excuse me a moment, dear," and rising, she went to the door, where she knew her husband was waiting.

"I think she will be all right now, Phil," she said in response to his anxious inquiry. "No, she is not ill. A doctor could do her no good. It is mothering, not doctoring, the poor little thing needs. I shall stay here

until she is quiet." Returning to the bedside, she sat fanning the hot little head until she was sure that Mary had forgotten her sorrows in sleep.

The next morning the little girl awoke to find her room flooded with sunshine, and imagining it to be quite late, she said her prayers and dressed quickly. "It would never do," she thought, "to be late for breakfast the very first morning." Peeping into Wilhelmina's room, she saw that that young lady had no intention of stirring for some time, so she opened the door and went out into the hall. All was quiet. Then she realized that it was still very early. Returning to her room, she stepped out of one of the long windows on to the wide porch, and stood drinking in the beauty of the scene before her. Her eyes wandered over the broad, bright green acres of cotton and tobacco to the dark back-ground of pine forest which bounded her view on the east. In front of the house, the grounds sloped away to the stone wall dividing them from the road, glimpses of which she could see through the great old trees and masses of shrubbery. Curious to know what lay on the other side of the house, she tiptoed around the bend of the porch to a point which commanded a fine view of the town five miles to the southwest. The land between was occupied by beautiful homes, each with its surrounding park and fields. Unaccustomed to judge distances in the country, Mary thought the town much nearer than it really was, so that when she caught sight of the little church steeple with its golden cross glistening in the sunlight, she hastened back to her room with the intention of going to Mass. Very quietly she made her way along the gallery and down the stairs. The front door stood open, so she knew that some of the servants must be up; however, she slipped out unobserved and walked quickly down the drive-way toward the big gates. Even this distance was greater than it had seemed from the porch, but she thought she might meet Wash and learn from him a short way to the Church. As she approached the lodge, the little colored boy, rubbing his eyes, emerged from it.

"Why foah dem white folks cain't stay in bed an' not git up so powahful early, am mo' dan dis chile kin tell," he yawned.

Mary thought the speech was intended for her; but from the start the boy gave when she spoke, she knew he had not seen her.

"Whah *yo'* come fum!" he cried. "Am yo' a sperrick?"

"I came here last evening from New York, and if you will please open the gates and tell me the shortest way to Church, I'll be much obliged to you."

"Wal, I declah! yo' is sartinly de whitest white folks I eber seed. Now, 'bout dem gates," scratching his head dubiously, "Marse done tol' me neber to open dem gates fo' none ob de chilluns, —— but den yo' all ain't none ob *his* chilluns nohow, so I reckon mebbe I kin open dem gates fo' *yo!* But, Missy, it am a mighty powahful long ways to dat Church. Nobody 'round hyah eber 'tempts to *walk* it."

"It doesn't look so very far; but if I thought Mr. Marvin wouldn't want you to open the gates, I shouldn't think of going."

"Wal, dat's what he done tol' dis hyah niggah, an' he done 'pressed it on me fo' sho! But," brightening visibly, "yo' kin ax him yo' own self. I heahs him acomin' now."

Mary, too, distinctly heard hoof-beats on the smooth hard drive. Presently, around the bend of the road he appeared, driving a pretty little horse and runabout.

"So you got ahead of me," he called cheerily. "May I ask, 'Where are you going, my pretty maid?' "

"Not very far," laughed Mary, "unless you will let Wash open the gates."

"Judging from your hat, we are bound for the same place; but you had better jump in her with me, unless you enjoy a ten-mile walk before breakfast."

"Ten miles!" echoed Mary.

"Exactly. Five there and five back. I am even doubtful about such a long drive for you. It would be wiser, I think, to let you get some milk and something to eat before we go. There is plenty of time."

"Really, I don't need it. At the Convent, I'm so accustomed to getting up early and not having breakfast right away, that I'm sure I'll be all right until we get back."

"Very well, then. But there is no necessity of your rising as early as you did today; six o'clock will be time enough. I saw you from my window and guessed your destination, but felt sure I could overtake you before you had gone very many miles, even if you had succeeded in coaxing Wash to open the gates."

"But I wouldn't do that after he told me you didn't wish it. Is it dangerous to go out on this road alone?"

"No, not particularly dangerous, though one is apt to meet stray cows or an occasional bull. My reason for keeping the gates closed is to prevent the little ones from roaming too far from the house. But any morning you wish to go to Mass, just wait for me on the porch. Phil usually accompanies me, but he has had to manage affairs during my absence, and is tired out. Mother would like to go, but she does not care to leave the children too much alone with the servants."

After the Mass and the long drive home, Mary was quite ready for breakfast ,and was glad to see Mrs. Marvin, with the baby in her arms, on the porch awaiting their return.

"You and father are the early birds this morning," she said, greeting the child affectionately. She feared lest traces of last night's storm should still be visible, and was greatly relieved when the little girl lifted to her a face as calm as the beautiful morning itself. "I impressed it on Wilhelmina," she continued, "that you were not to be disturbed this morning, but from present indications, she herself is the only one who has profited by my warning. You must have a fine appetite for

your breakfast. The boys are already waiting," and she led the way to the dining room.

"Where ith Willie, moth-ah?" drawled Fred.

"I have sent Jinny up to see. She will be here soon."

"All de pannie-takes will be eated up," observed Dick, anxiously. "P'ease put some away for her, daddy," for the little fellow was very fond of his only sister.

"Oh, I think Aunt Chloe has plenty more in the kitchen. Besides, Willie must learn to be on time. Here she is, now."

A shout of merriment greeted the little girl as she slipped behind her father's chair into her place.

"He, he!" giggled Freddie. "Willie looketh like a dwownded wat."

"My dear child!" exclaimed her mother, "what *have* you done to your hair?"

"She looks as though she has forsaken the vanities of the world in good earnest," laughed Mr. Marvin. "Mary, what notions have you been putting into her head?"

"You may all laugh as much as you like," declared the object of all this mirth, wiping her forehead to remove the rivulets of water trickling from her hair, "but I am going to wear it this way until," she looked about to see that Lyda was not in the room, "until it is no longer as woolly and kinky as Jinny's," and the handkerchief was again required for the back of her neck.

"There's a regular river running down in front of your ear. Catch it, quick, or it will fall into your coffee," cried Bob.

It was in vain that Mrs. Marvin strove to check the fun. The sight of their sister's rebellious curls literally soaked and neatly plastered down over her ears, was too much for the boys; so, as most of them had finished breakfast, their mother excused them from the table.

"I shall send Jinny to your room to help you dry your

hair, Wilhelmina. If the weather were not so warm, it would be necessary to wrap you in blankets and keep you in bed all day, as you remember we were obliged to do when you fell into the rain barrel."

Mary noticed that the mother's eyes twinkled though she seemed very serious indeed.

"Mary ith comin' with me to thee my guinea-pigth, aren't you, Mary?"

"And she's going to wide in my doat-tart; muddie said so," piped Dick.

"Gently, boys, gently," interrupted their father. "The day is long, and it is not yet half-past eight. What would you like to do, Mary?"

"I think I had better write to Uncle, the very first thing."

"It alwayth taketh Willie thuch an awful long time to write a letter," remarked Fred, ruefully.

"But you will see, Freddie, that it won't take me long at all. I wrote on the train yesterday and mailed it at the station here, so Uncle Frank will not expect such a long letter today."

"You and Dick run off and find Harry. By the time you harness up and drive around to the steps, Mary will be there waiting for you," said their father. "Come into the library, Mary. You will find writing material there. When you have finished your letter, Willie will be ready to accompany you on a tour of the grounds."

At dinner that evening, Mary declared, "It will take me all tomorrow morning to tell Uncle what I've seen today. Every one of you has pets of some kind—rabbits, or squirrels, or pigeons, or guinea-pigs, or chickens, to say nothing of ponies and horses."

"She fordot my billy-doat," said Dick in an aggrieved whisper to his mother.

"I'm going to write a whole page about my fine ride in Dick's goat-cart," continued Mary, who had overheard his remark; and Dick was comforted.

"You have seen most everything outside, so tomorrow I am going to show you our theater and the nursery and some other nice places in the house," said Wilhelmina.

The next morning, after writing her long letter, Mary followed Wilhelmina to the big attic, which the boys had fitted up for private theatricals. All went well there. Such, however, was not the case in the nursery, the next place visited; and Mrs. Marvin, seated on the west porch with her sewing-basket beside her, was surprised to hear the scurry of feet and the breathless demand, "O Jinny, where's mother, quick!"

"Here I am, Wilhelmina," she called, rising so hastily as to upset her work-basket; for though accustomed to being summoned almost daily to bind up cuts and bruises, she was really alarmed at the tragic note in Wilhelmina's voice.

With a bound, the child came through the long window.

"Go to her quick, mother! she's gone to her room."

"But what is it, dear? What has happened? Did she fall?"

"Oh, no, no! she isn't hurt," answered the child as they passed through the library towards the stairs. "We were in the nursery playing with the babies and having lots of fun, and all of a sudden she began to cry and ran out, and oh! I didn't know what to do for her, so I came for you."

"Poor, motherless child! I wonder, little daughter, if you ever thank God for having spared you an affliction such as Mary has suffered."

"Indeed I do, mother, every single day," said the little girl, throwing her arms about her mother's neck, her black eyes filled with tears. "It almost chokes me to think of such a thing."

"There, there, darling. Let me go to her now. Run back to the porch and pick up my sewing. What would mother ever do without her one wee girlie!"

By the time she reached Mary's room, the worst was over. She found the little girl where she had flung herself on her knees beside the bed, her face hidden on her arm.

"It's the babies and everything," said the child sadly, "but I wish Wilhelmina hadn't bothered you."

"It is no bother at all, darling, but it would be so much better for you if you would come to me when you feel like this. I want you to promise to do that, will you not?"

"Oh, sometimes I just long to talk to someone, and I can't to Uncle, because it makes him feel bad, too. So if you really wouldn't mind——"

"I am only too glad to help you every way I can, my dear child, and when you return to school you must write me some long letters."

"It was all to have been so nice, next year. Uncle hasn't lived in our home, you know, for two years; but in the spring, when he knew mother was coming, he had the house all fixed up and we were to live there again, and I was to go to day-school. And we expected to have Wilhelmina to spend all the short holidays with us, and now," choking down a sob, "it can't ever be."

"Yes, yes, you will live there and keep house for Uncle Frank; and Wilhelmina shall visit you as often as you wish," said Mrs. Marvin, cheerfully. "Uncle Phil and I shall, too, if we are invited."

"Indeed you are, right now—the whole family."

"Come down on the porch and help me with the mending; with three home from school, the basket is never empty. I shall have to engage you girls to sew on buttons."

"We can do more than that. Sister Austin would be ashamed of us if we couldn't darn stockings."

They found Wilhelmina seated in her mother's rocker, busily employed with a needle.

"I thought I'd s'prise you. Seven buttons," she announced, proudly displaying her work.

"That is a very agreeable surprise, indeed," replied her mother, drawing a low chair beside her for Mary, while Wilhelmina placed one for herself on the other side. "At what hour does the ball game begin?"

"Four-thirty, sharp. You, and father, and Mary are to have seats in the grand-stand—that's packing boxes with chairs on top."

"Don't you play, Mary?"

"The boys tried to teach me yesterday, but I'm what Fred calls a 'butter-fingers.' If they would play with a rubber ball, I think I could catch it all right; but I'm a great big coward when it comes to that hard ball."

"Just wait until we begin tennis, mother. Even the graduates couldn't beat Mary there. We put off the tournament until Monday on account of the ball game today. The boys will open their eyes, *then.*"

"How about the ponies?"

"Uncle taught me to ride, and Phil says we are all going somewhere tomorrow evening."

Thus they chatted until lunch time, Mrs. Marvin meanwhile resolving to keep Mary with her as much as possible when the child was not engaged in out-door sports.

Sunday morning found the wagonette at the door, and the whole family drove in to Mass. Late in the afternoon, Mr. Marvin and the children, with the exception of the two babies, mounted their horses and ponies for the promised ride. They were, indeed, a merry group as they passed down the long drive-way, through the gates, and then set out at a brisk canter toward the west until they came to the cross-roads where they turned northward. Mr. Marvin with Fred on his right and the girls on his left, led the way, and as none of the children knew what was in store for them, quite a little curiosity and excitement prevailed.

"Ith we goin' a long wayth, fawth-ah?" questioned Fred.

"Long enough to give little folks a good appetite for supper," was the uncompromising reply.

"I know," cried Joe, "we are going to the old mill."

As each in turn tried to guess their destination, their father smilingly remarked, "These are all very good hints for our next outing."

Even the older boys were mystified as they followed along the shady roads which, after a time, became unfamiliar to them. At length, passing through a small pine woods, they came out into the open and saw before them a tiny farm. Some distance back from the road stood a long, low, old-fashioned house. The boys were surprised when their father turned in at the gate and drew rein at the front steps. Springing from his horse, he assisted the girls to alight, striving, meanwhile, to conceal his amusement at the perplexed faces about him. Suddenly, somewhere from the midst of the honeysuckle and rose vines which covered the porch, an old colored woman appeared. Her spotless calico dress, big white apron and turban were in keeping with the general neatness of the place.

"Yo' is welcome, Marse Marvin, yo' an' yo'n," she exclaimed, courtesying profoundly, "an' I done got ready fo' yo' all yeste'day, so's I culd rest on de Lawd's Day."

"That is right, Mammy, and you will find that these young folks will do justice to all your good things."

After all had been introduced, they followed her into the house.

"Now," said Mr. Marvin, with a wave of his hand towards the feast spread before them, "don't say that I cannot keep a secret."

"But where are we, father?" and "Who is she?" were among the many questions with which he was besieged when the old woman had disappeared into the kitchen.

"We are nearly twelve miles northwest of home, and this little farm belongs to Uncle Ephraim, whom I have known for years. That old woman is his wife."

"But why didn't we ever come here before, father?" inquired Harry.

"There is nothing particularly interesting about this place, and these old colored folks are so like some of those on our own plantation, that it never occurred to me that you would care to visit them. But Friday, being in this neighborhood, I met old Mammy, and nothing would satisfy her but that I should bring you all to see Uncle Ephraim."

"Do they live here all alone?"

"They have two sons who look after the farm for them. The old man is quite blind now and unable to work."

When Mammy reentered the room, Mr. Marvin observed, "The appearance of the table should be a great compliment to your cooking, Mammy. They have not left enough to feed the crows."

"Dey is powahful good eatahs, sho' nuf, but dat's what it's dar fo'; an' now ma ole man am out'n de porch, an' wants fo' to see yo' all afore yo' goes home."

Out trooped the merry party to be presented to Uncle Ephraim.

"Selwyn, sah? Yo' say *Selwyn?* Any kin to de Virginny Selwyns?" demanded the old darkey when Mary's name was mentioned.

"Yes, indeed, her father was Robert Selwyn, of Cedar Ridge."

"Not ma Massa Rob! Yo' doan tell me! De bestest frien' dis heah poah ole niggah eber had. Why, sah! ef it warn't fo' him, I wouldn't hab nuffin in dis world."

"How is that, Uncle Ephraim? I was not aware that you had ever lived in Virginia, and was under the impression that old Mr. Clayton gave you this place just before he died." The next moment Mr. Marvin regretted his question, for he feared the effect any allusion to her father might produce on Mary. But the little girl had slipped in nearer to the old man's chair and was eagerly waiting to hear his story.

"Wal, sah, yo' is part right an' part wrong. Marse Clayton sartinly done gibbed me dis heah propahty 'foah he died, but some ob his kin turned up when he war gone, an' run me clar out'n heah wifout 'lowin' me to 'spress ma 'pinion on de mattah. So tings went fum bad to wus, an' at last' I jes' natchally wandahed ober to'd Virginny; an' one blazin' hot day, I was atrampin' along a country road, same as heahabouts, an' I kem to de gates ob what looked lak a big park. On de lawn inside, dey war a boy ob sixteen wif his brudder an' sistah, bof youngah 'n him, an' while I war alooking' in at dem, de brudder up an' frowed a stone at me. Den de big fellah, dat war Massa Rob, he done shout to his brudder to quit dat, an' he kem to de gates, an' when he foun' I war alookin' fo' work, he let me in an' tuk me up to de house. His pa, ole Marse Selwyn, done raised a powahful rumpus an 'clared dey was too many niggahs round de place already, but Massa Rob done sayed dat he wanted me fo' to dribe his muddah ca'ful-like, kase she war an invalid. But jes' de same, ole Marse an' Missy Bertha alwuz 'peared to hab it in fo' dis heah niggah, an' aftah de Missus died an' Massa Rob done went to college, I wuz fo' gwine somewhars, too, but Massa Rob made me promise to stay round de ole place till he done got a lawyer fellah to git back ma li'l farm again. An' he done got it back fum dem rascalions, an' I'se libbed heah in peace, eber since, tanks to Massa Rob. I was de only niggah on de ole place when he done brought his bride home; fo' Missy Bertha, she *war* an awful one sho' nuf, ordahed dem all away fo' de day, an' she done bamboozled ole Marse into gwine too. Massa Alfred war in Europe den, dey sayed."

Fearing the old man was about to tread on dangerous ground, Mr. Marvin rose hastily, exclaiming, "Yonder is the moon, children. We must make a start, or mother will be anxious."

Amid a chorus of farewells and promises to come again, the little party rode away, but not before Mary, who lingered a moment on the porch, had pressed the

horny old hand and thanked Uncle Ephraim for his loyalty to her father.

The homeward ride in the moonlight was quite a novelty to the younger children. The lateness of the hour proved too much for Fred, and when he began to yawn and blink, his father lifted him from his pony and placed the little fellow before him on his own horse; "Just in time to save a fall," he remarked to Phil, tossing him the pony's bridle.

As they entered their own gates, Harry proposed singing "Home, Sweet Home." Like a flash, Wilhelmina swung around in her saddle, waving her hand in vehement protest and pointing to Mary, who was busy conversing with Mr. Marvin. Dropping back among the boys, their sister promptly vetoed anything that might affect their little guest. Finally, "Keep in de Middle ob de Road" was chosen as least calculated to arouse sad thoughts.

Mrs. Marvin, waiting on the veranda, heard the happy voices, and as the party appeared around the bend in the drive, she too, joined in the humorous refrain.

Early the following morning, the tournament began. By her skill on the tennis-court, Mary more than regained all she had lost by her timidity in the ball-field. In the beginning, the older boys, fearing to discourage their little guest, played somewhat carelessly, but it was not long before even Phil saw that she was a rival not to be despised. As Harry expressed it at lunch that day, "Mary seems to be everywhere at once and nobody can catch her napping."

"She ith like a grath-hopper," declared Fred. "She jumpth an' runth an' skipth an' never misseth a ball."

Mary laughed gaily at these criticisms.

"Uncle enjoys tennis so much and he plays splendidly, so he taught me lots of little tricks that make up for my lack of muscle. I couldn't do much, though, with a heavy racket."

"Do you mean to say," inquired Mr. Marvin "that

you play with your uncle? During our time, he was the best tennis player at college."

"Yes, Uncle Phil, we have had some fine games together, and I've beaten him sometimes, too."

"I shall have to try a bout with you myself, little lady."

"You'll never beat father, Mary," declared Bob, proudly. "He can white-wash everyone around here, left-handed."

"Not so fast, young man," interrupted his father. "I shall wait until the tournament is over; in the meantime it may be well for me to practice up a bit."

At last the contest was ended and the prize, a handsome, silver-mounted riding-whip, was unanimously awarded to Mary.

"When will you play your game, father?"

"How will tomorrow morning suit you, Mary, or would you prefer to rest a day or two?" asked Mr. Marvin.

"I'll be rested by morning, Uncle Phil, but it seems out of place for me to play with you," she replied, a little shyly. "Uncle Frank is the only big person I've ever played with."

"Oh, I must get my hand in before he arrives," said Mr. Marvin reassuringly, "and since you can beat him occasionally, I shall feel better prepared if I can win a few games from you."

In the morning, Mary again donned her pretty white flannel suit, and at nine o'clock the entire family and some of the servants assembled under the trees which bordered the court, to witness the game between "Massa an' li'l Missy."

"Phil had better call up the ambulance," suggested Bob.

"Why, pray?" demanded his eldest brother.

"To carry her off the field after father gets through with her," answered Bob, scornfully.

"Wait!" was Phil's reply.

"They're goin' to begin," announced Frank. The merry chatter subsided and all eyes were fixed on the contestants.

"It 'minds me ob David an' Goliah," declared Sam, "but I reckon *dis* time David am agwine ter git de wust ob it."

"I doan know," was the rejoinder, "li'l Missy am powahful pert wif dat racket, so she am."

Like his sons, Mr. Marvin thought he would not discourage the little girl; but like them, too, he soon found himself hard pushed to defend his own against the skillful attacks of his young adversary. The first game was nearly finished when Mary, who was ahead, called for time, declaring, "I think this game oughtn't to be counted. We've just been getting acquainted. Let us begin another in earnest."

To this proposal all agreed, and the players settled down to real work. Mr. Marvin was considered by the surrounding country, an authority on tennis, but his most skillful strokes were met and returned in a manner he seldom expected, so that he was kept very busy indeed, while Mary fluttered about like a dainty white butterfly, seeming always to alight on a spot just before the ball reached it. At length "deuce" was called, followed by "advantage" for Mr. Marvin, then for Mary, and so on, until Harry whispered to Phil, "Do you see what she's up to? She's got the idea that it wouldn't be good manners to beat father, so she's going to keep this going until he calls a halt."

"I believe you're right. I've been trying to figure it out, but couldn't get at the bottom of it. Why! she has let the grandest chances slip. She could have broken "deuce" three times in the last five minutes. I believe I'll give father a hint."

"Don't you do it. Let her have her way. She's a mighty nice little thing."

"I wish I knew a few of her tricks with the racket."

"I guess she would teach them to us. I'll ask her."

Mrs. Marvin, too, began to suspect the cause of the long game, and as the heat was becoming intense, she insisted that it should be discontinued.

"What yo' say now 'bout David?" demanded Wash of Sam, as the colored folk returned to their duties.

"I say dey am on moah frien'ly terms dan dey ancestahs," laughed Sam, with a nod in the direction of the house towards which Mr. Marvin was conducting Mary, with all the big and little Marvins trooping after.

At the lunch-table, Harry broached the subject of tennis lessons, and Mary, delighted to be of use, joyfully consented to teach the boys all she knew of the game. During the meal, Bob was very quiet, and towards evening, when the twins were "cleaned up," the following argument took place on the lowest of the front steps:

"Aw! father wasn't half playing. He could have beaten her easily."

"I don't know about that," answered Frank, "I never saw him play so hard before, and I heard Phil and Harry whispering about it, and they seemed to think Mary just didn't want to beat him."

"Huh! 'cause she couldn't. She's a fraid-cat anyway," continued Bob, savagely digging a hole in the gravel with his heel. "She's ascared of a base-ball, and she can't ride standing up like Willie, anyhow."

"I s'pose she never had any practice. But I think she's awful nice. That day I hurt my foot she stayed on the porch and read to me all morning, even though Willie was teasing and teasing her to go play."

Mr. Marvin, who in the midst of the conversation had established himself on the porch to read the paper, was much amused by what he heard and finally called the two little boys to his side.

"Now, my lads, what is it all about?"

"Oh, he's always sticking up for Mary, and everybody's always talking about her wonderful tennis playing," began Bob.

"So she *is* a wonderful tennis-player my boy, and I am glad to hear that Frank is 'sticking up' for our little guest."

"But—but——" said Bob, fidgeting from one foot to the other, "she didn't beat *you* anyhow."

"Oh, that's the trouble," laughed his father. "Well, neither did I beat her. Why don't you want her to beat *me?*" he inquired, watching the child intently.

"Cause—cause I want you to be the biggest and best in everything," blurted out Bob.

"You may console yourself as to the first point, my boy, for in all my travels I have never met anyone quite as tall as I am. And for the second,—my little folks will have to ask the good God to give me the grace necessary to be the best in honesty, charity, and all other virtues. As for Mary's being cowardly,—I think she is very brave for a little girl who has never before had boy companions."

"Hasn't she any brothers?"

"Her brothers died when they were babies; her father, two years ago; her mother and little sisters, in June; she has no one left but Uncle Frank and her aunt at the Convent."

As Mr. Marvin proceeded, two pairs of black eyes grew rounder and rounder.

"Whew! that's hard!"

"Maybe that's why she looks sometimes like she'd been crying. I thought it was 'cause she got scared of something."

"Mother and I would feel very bad if any of our little ones were unkind to her, or said anything to add to her sorrow."

"I guess you needn't be afraid of us two, father," Bob hastened to say. "I didn't know it was like that. She can be the best in everything if she wants to, just so it will make her happy again."

"Let's get Sam to saddle the ponies. We'll find her

and Willie and have races down to the gate," suggested Frank, and the two scampered off, at peace with the whole world.

Mr. Marvin sat with his paper on his knee reflecting on the change the Doctor would find in his niece; for though the child still had her lonely spells, she had kept her promise to go to his wife for the comfort and consolation she so sorely needed, and that good lady, with a mother's watchfulness and tact, was ever on the alert to provide some new amusement or employment for the two little girls.

Two weeks of intense heat followed the great tennis game. One sultry afternoon, when the entire family was enjoying the usual siesta, Mary slipped down to the library, where she selected an interesting book and then settled herself in a big chair on the east porch. So interested did she become in her story, that she did not observe the tall figure stretched out in the hammock at the far end of the porch, nor did she hear Mr. Marvin arise and tiptoe around the corner of the house. A few moments later she was surprised to see him drive up to the steps in the runabout.

"May I have the pleasure of your company, my dear?"

"O yes, Uncle Phil, there's nothing I'd like better than a drive this hot afternoon."

"There is a little breeze springing up which will make it all the more pleasant. Never mind your hat. Willie's parasol is here under the seat if you need it, but the roads in the direction we are going are quite shady. I left word with Jinny to tell mother where we have gone."

Once on the main road, he turned the horse's head eastward.

"We are going a new way today, aren't we?" asked Mary. "I've always been curious to know what lies beyond that pine-forest."

"Well, your curiosity is about to be satisfied. It is a long drive through those woods, but we have the after-

noon before us, and I can think of no cooler place on a warm day."

After driving some distance, the road narrowed suddenly, then plunged into the dense forest before them, where it was carpeted so thickly with pine needles that the sound of Nell's hoofs could not be heard. Mary threw back her head and sniffed the delicious fragrance.

"On our way back we shall stop to gather some needles for a pillow, which you can keep in your room to remind you of your visit among us."

"I'd like to have a pine pillow, but not to remind me of you all. I shan't need anything to do that."

"I think Uncle Frank will see a great improvement in you. Phil must weigh you to see how much you have gained."

"I'm glad I look better. Uncle will be so pleased," said the child, contentedly. "I know I *feel* better. I never get so very tired any more. But these woods must be miles and miles."

"They *are* very large, and this road winds in and out, so in that way the distance to the other side is increased. But we shall soon be out in the open."

"It seems as if we are going a little higher all the time; what is that dull, booming sound?"

"That is my surprise for you. Have patience a little longer."

Mary waited eagerly. A few moments later the road made a sudden turn and they were out of the woods. Mr. Marvin drew rein on top of a high bluff overlooking a long stretch of sandy beach upon which the great ocean was flinging its huge breakers. For some little time he sat silent, drinking in the beauty of his favorite scene; then remembering that he was not alone, he turned to see what effect it had produced on the little girl at his side. To his amazement, he beheld her with her face buried in her hands.

"My dear child, are you ill?"

"Oh, go some other way, please! *please!*"

Suddenly realizing what the trouble was, he swiftly turned the horse about and soon regained the shelter of the woods.

"My poor little girl, you must pardon my thoughtlessness."

"Indeed, I ought to ask *your* pardon after all the trouble you have taken to bring me here," she replied, making a great effort to control her voice. "But I really couldn't help it—it was so unexpected and made me think of everything at once. Oh! sometimes I just can't believe it's true. Don't you think, Uncle Phil," turning imploringly to him, "that there may have been some terrible mistake?"

"I wish I could think so, Mary, but, from what your uncle told me, I know that all that was within human power was done at the time. Even if one of the boats were missing, which is not the case, news of it would certainly have reached New York before this. But hark!" as an ominous rumble warned him of the near approach of a storm. "We shall have to run for it. Ten miles from home and no shelter nearer than our own lodge. I fear we shall get a ducking. Take the lines for a few moments—no danger of meeting any vehicle here—I shall see if there is anything under the seat to protect you from the rain. Here is the parasol—it may help some—and an old rain coat of Phil's. Slip this on. It is not the latest cut, to be sure. The trees are so thick that we shall not suffer until we get out on the big road."

"But you have nothing for yourself."

"I am accustomed to an occasional drenching. Now, hold on tight, for when Nell gets started, she goes like the wind." He touched the horse lightly with the whip, and with her pretty head far forward and her ears flattened back, she sped through the rapidly darkening forest.

"Why not stay in the woods until it is over?" asked Mary, after a long silence.

"Too much danger from the lightning," was the brief response, for Mr. Marvin was busy keeping a sharp look-out on the narrow road ahead. "Hold fast! we are coming to a turn," he exclaimed, "and when Nell is going at this rate, she stops for nothing."

They had gone but a few yards farther when they were startled by a blinding flash of lightning, followed by the crashing of a tree across the road behind them.

"That was a narrow escape, but we shall soon be out of this. Yonder is the road."

Mary looked ahead through the opening between the trees and saw the broad white road across which the rain was being driven in sheets. Mr. Marvin was obliged to shout to make himself heard above the roar of the wind.

"Pull your collar up high and open the parasol. Hold it far down in front of your face and brace the handle against the back of the seat. No,—don't mind me. I'm all right."

Mary tried to obey his directions, but they were scarcely out of the forest when a gust of wind seized the parasol, turning it inside out and wresting it from her grasp. As she saw it carried up into a tree, she uttered a cry of dismay.

"Never mind it. She has a new one, so she will not care," cried Mr. Marvin.

On and on dashed Nell over the smooth road.

"Slip your hand into my pocket and see if you can find a whistle there.—That's it. Now, when we get to the stone wall ahead, blow that as hard as you can until I tell you to stop."

The little girl did as she was told, and soon saw, as if in answer to the shrill blasts, a small flag fluttering above the trees.

"All right. Wash has heard us and will have the gates open so we shall have no delay there. Be ready for the next turn. It will be a sharp one."

Through the gates they swept and up the drive. As

they neared the porch, they saw Phil and Sam in great rain-coats, awaiting them. Frightened little faces were pressed against the window panes and Mrs. Marvin was at the door. Nell halted with an abruptness that almost threw Mary from the seat, and Mr. Marvin, tossing the lines to Sam, sprang to the ground, caught her in his strong arms and carried her into the house.

"Safe and sound, thank God, but pretty wet, eh?" he cried, cheerily.

"Only my hair, but that will soon dry," she responded, turning to thank Wilhelmina and Harry who had helped her off with the rain-coat. As she did so she heard Mr. Marvin say in a low tone to his wife, "The most unfortunate trip I ever planned. First the sea and then this storm. It has been enough to undo all the good work of the past weeks." What Mrs. Marvin answered, she did not hear; but she made up her mind that, as far as lay in *her* power, no ill effects of the day should be seen. So she began gaily to relate the parasol episode, while Wilhelmina helped her wring the water from her hair, until Mrs. Marvin interrupted her with, "We must get you to bed and warm you up a little."

"Oh, I'm quite warm now. It was only towards the last that it began to get chilly. If I wouldn't be in Aunt Chloe's way, I could dry my hair nicely out by the range and be ready for dinner."

But to this plan the good lady would not listen, and insisted that her husband, too, should be properly cared for.

"Very well," said the latter with a laugh, "it is not often I have an opportunity of being coddled, so I shall not wait to be told twice. You may as well give in gracefully, Mary," he called back from the gallery. "Mother will have her way in the end, and it is usually the best way, as I have reason to know."

"Phil, go with father and get him anything he needs. Wilhelmina may tell Lyda that they are home and badly in need of something hot to drink. Then come upstairs and set your little tea-table in Mary's room, and later

on you two may have supper together. Harry, will you amuse these little folks for awhile? I shall be down in time for dinner. Now, my dear child," to Mary, "you and I shall go upstairs. You are trembling!"

"I'm beginning to feel all shivery and queer, but I'll be all right soon. My dress is soaked from my hair."

"We shall soon remedy that," said Mrs. Marvin, who, leaving Mary in her own room, disappeared into Wilhelmina's, returning immediately with a rubber cap. "Wilhelmina wears this when she goes swimming. We shall bundle your hair into it, and after you are in bed, I shall move this little electric heater close to you; between it and a brisk rubbing, we shall have your hair dried in no time. Here is Lyda with a big bowl of piping hot milk. Drink every bit of it and you will feel better. It will help you to sleep, too. Lyda, if you will please bring the tea-table from the next room, Wilhelmina will have it ready for that nice little supper Aunt Chloe is going to send up here."

While Mrs. Marvin endeavored to make Mary comfortable, her little daughter flitted to and fro, bringing from her room the various articles of a dainty tea-set.

"I so seldom use this, that it seems quite an event tonight," she declared. Disappearing into her room again, she did not return until Lyda entered, bearing a large tray. In the meantime she had changed her dress and now appeared in the full costume of a trained nurse. "I wore it in a play," she explained, "but I never expected to have such a grand chance as this to show it off. Mother, Mary will get another chill if she puts her arms out from under those blankets, won't she? So I must feed her. No objections!" as Mary attempted to remonstrate. "The patient must obey the nurse. There's the dinner gong, mother. We shall get along beautifully."

Mrs. Marvin left them, stopping on the way to the dining-room to speak to her husband. If he required anything beyond her statement that Mary was in good spirits, the merry peals of laughter that issued from the

end room, fully assured him that the effects of the drive were not as serious as he had feared.

The violence of the storm had abated, but the rain continued to fall in a soft steady pour, not only during the night, but for the two following days. The children tried to amuse themselves as best they could with indoor games and books, until Harry suggested that it was a fine time to practice a play.

"Let's have 'Cinderella'," proposed Wilhelmina. "Mary would make a lovely one."

"She ought to be the fairy god-mother," said Frank.

"There are too many female characters in that play. You girls would have to be two or three people at once," declared Phil.

" 'Tabby's Table-cloth' then," insisted his sister.

"Not much!" cried Joe. "You don't catch any of us being Hessians and Britishers, and they're the only men in that play."

"Why not get up some tableaux?" suggested their mother. "They do not require as much practice as a play, and your father had a letter today saying that Uncle Frank will be down next week."

A shout of applause greeted this information, and Mary's face beamed with delight at this manifestation of affection for her uncle.

"Let's have one tableau of the Guardian Angel, with Mary for the angel and Dick for the little child picking the flowers, like in the picture," cried Wilhelmina.

"But why should I be the angel or the fairy god-mother?" asked Mary, growing embarrassed at so much attention. "You can act ever so much better than I can."

"Did *you* ever see an angel or a fairy with such a looking head as mine?" demanded Wilhelmina.

After lunch, they repaired to the library to decide on the subjects of the tableaux; when all were satisfied, a trip was made to the big trunk in the attic, and appropriate costumes were selected. Then some practising

was done, and when the dinner gong sounded, all agreed that it had been the shortest rainy day they had ever spent, Wilhelmina declaring that she wouldn't mind if it rained for a month; nevertheless, she showed signs of rejoicing with the others when the sun again appeared; "because," as she was careful to explain, "it doesn't seem quite natural to be cooped up in the house in August." The tennis lessons and other outdoor sports were resumed, and the principal topic of conversation at all meals was, "What we shall do while Uncle Frank is here."

"Will you decorate the wagonette, as you did when we came?" inquired Mary, a few days before his arrival.

"Suppose we do," said Harry. "He will think it jolly fun."

Little did anyone suspect the event which so nearly brought the happy vacation to a tragic close.

The following morning, after Mr. Marvin and Phil had gone to the fields to superintend the work there, and the boys had scattered in various directions, Wilhelmina and Mary obtained permission to take the baby to the clover field, where a late crop was in full bloom. Mrs. Marvin, from her usual place on the porch with her work-basket beside her, called after them, "Be sure that none of the animals are in the field." Arriving there, the little girls satisfied themselves that all was safe, and entering by the gate on the east side, they wheeled the baby-buggy far into the center of the field where the blossoms were larger. Taking Jack out, they placed him on the ground beside them, then busied themselves making chains. Wilhelmina had brought her parasol, which was of a deep rose color, and as the sun soon proved too hot, she raised it and proceeded to fasten it to the side of the buggy. An angry bellow from the south side of the field caused the little girls to spring to their feet. With cries of terror and dismay, Mary caught up the baby, Wilhelmina the parasol, and both started for the gate with old Jef, the bull, in hot pursuit.

"He must have been lying down in that high grass," wailed Wilhelmina.

Glancing over her shoulder, Mary realized that they could never reach the gate in time.

"Throw away your parasol and take Jack!" she cried. "Now run for all you're worth, and when you get out close the gate tight. Don't mind!" as Wilhelmina paused to question. "*Run!*"

Catching up the gay parasol, she waved it about her head the better to attract Jef's attention, then made for the high fence on the north. With a savage roar, he followed. As she neared the fence, she looked hurriedly around, saw that Wilhelmina and the baby were safe and the gate closed. All her effort now must be to save herself. She was a swift runner and had a good start of the bull, but she realized that Jef was rapidly gaining on her. Running along close to the fence, she kept a sharp lookout for a space wide enough to allow her to roll under the bars; for she well knew that the great animal would be upon her before she could climb to the top. But the fence was well built and left no loop-hole of escape. On and on she ran, many thoughts passing through the little brain. "Uncle will say I was right to do it.—They are safe, anyway, and I'm so glad. Wilhelmina is the only little girl, and then the baby—it would be terrible for Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta if they were killed.—Uncle and Aunt Mary will miss me, too, but I'm not their very own like Wilhelmina and Jack.—Mother would say it was right, too——" she gulped down a sob and dashed the tears from her eyes. "Oh! I can't run much farther.—He'll get me if someone doesn't come soon!—Guess I'd—better—make—an act—of—Contrition." She stumbled on, half-blindly, her breath coming in little gasps.

Meanwhile, Wilhelmina, screaming at the top of her voice, hastened on as fast as her heavy burden permitted. The first ones she met were the twins.

"Get mother and father, quick! get anybody! run! Jef's after Mary! Oh, I'm afraid he's got her by this

time!" and thoroughly exhausted, the child sank to the ground still clasping the precious baby in her arms.

The boys, shouting wildly, darted away—Bob towards the cotton field, Frank in the direction of the house, some distance from which he met his mother who had heard the savage bellowing of the bull and the screams of the children and was hurrying to the clover field. He assured her that his sister and the baby were safe, but that Mary was being eaten by Jef.

"Find Jinny and tell her to come after baby, and tell Lyda to bring me what she knows I need from the medicine cabinet. Be quick!" and she ran swiftly on.

Mr. Marvin, Phil, and the colored men, far down in the west cotton field, also heard the bull's first indication of wrath, and seizing the nearest farm implements, all ran in the direction of the sounds.

"If anyone is in danger, kill Jef at once!" shouted Mr. Marvin.

"Yonder goes Willy! She's carrying something!" exclaimed Phil.

"It's Jack. Where is Mary? God grant that she, at least, is safe," said his father. "Mose! run around to the east end and close the gate!"

Through fields and over fences they went, reaching the cloverfield far sooner than it takes to relate; and Mary, sobbing out the words of the Act of Contrition, was made aware of their approach by the shout, "Throw the parasol to your left and run to the right."

She obeyed mechanically and stumbled blindly in the direction whence the deep voice proceeded. She did not see Phil leap down from the fence, nor Mr. Marvin astride the top rail, nor the row of faces, ashen with terror, peering through the bars; but she felt herself tossed into the air, and her only thought was that bulls were much gentler than she had supposed. Instead of falling, however, she was conscious of being caught by strong arms and carefully lowered until she was laid on the grass; then, while someone threw water in her face,

she heard a voice saying, "I declah! ef she ain't de pluckiest! Catch dis yeah niggah arunnin' befoah a mad bull, awavin' ob a red umbrellah! No sah!"

"Shet yo' mouf, Abe! De poah chile am daid, fo' sho!" and Mary, though she was so very, very tired, felt that she *must* open her eyes to let them know that such was not the case.

"Dar now! She ain't daid, nohow! Glory hallelujah!" cried Abe, at the same time pushing the darkies aside to make room for Mrs. Marvin, who, pale and breathless, arrived just in time to hear the reassuring shout. Kneeling beside the prostrate child, she proceeded to use the remedies brought by Lyda. At a sign from Mr. Marvin the crowd of darkies dispersed, Phil following to tell them that work would be suspended for the remainder of the day. By this time the rest of the boys had joined the group.

"Where is Willie?" asked her father.

"She ith up at the houth, cryin' her eyth out cauth she thinkth Mary ith——"

"Run up quickly and tell her she isn't," interrupted Harry.

"You are feeling a little better now, are you not?" Mrs. Marvin inquired, leaning over Mary.

"Just tired—that's—all."

Mr. Marvin lifted her from the ground saying cheerily, "I think she will be more comfortable in her own bed."

"Oh—I am sure—I can walk."

"But I prefer the honor of carrying you, and as I am the bigger man, you will have to let me have my way."

Phil walked beside his father, using his big straw hat to shield Mary's head from the blazing sun. After them came Mrs. Marvin surrounded by the boys, each anxious to tell what he knew.

"I gueth she *ith* thort of an angel, don't you think tho' mothah?" inquired Fred, who had once more joined the party.

"I *know* that she is a very brave little girl, and that her guardian angel took good care of *her*," responded his mother.

"Who would ever think that an ordinary girl could run like that," said Bob.

"I think it's about time you fellows saw that she *isn't* an ordinary girl," blurted Harry.

"Well then she's *extree* ordinary," suggested Frank.

"You've said it right, this time," responded his brother.

"I don't think she's real at all. She's one of those 'sperriks' that old Abe tells about," said Joe.

"Aw, she ain't either. She's as real as you are, and a lot braver, too," declared Harry, indignantly.

"She squealed when she saw a mouse in the barn yesterday," objected Joe, dubiously.

"And *you* squealed when I put a wet wash-rag in your bed. You thought it was a rat." At which allusion Joe hung his head until Mrs. Marvin came to the rescue.

"Well, my boys, however much we may differ in opinion, I am sure we will all agree that Mary has today proved herself very brave indeed, and that, had we been in her place, we might not have displayed such heroism."

"That's it, mother, she's a *hero-ess!*" cried Bob, delighted to find a suitable epithet.

"And," continued his mother, "I hope we all realize the immense debt of gratitude we owe to this little girl, who risked her life to save Wilhelmina's and baby's. It is a debt we can never, never pay." She was obliged to pause to overcome her emotion at the thought of how different all would have been but for Mary's devotion. Later on, when she had put the little girl to bed and stooped to kiss the pale forehead, her grateful tears fell on the white face as she reflected that, but for this frail child, her own darlings would then be lying paler and colder in the adjoining room. The big blue eyes opened and the little arms clasped themselves tightly around her neck.

"You are so good to me," she murmured, "and I'm always giving you so much trouble."

"Trouble!" exclaimed Mrs. Marvin, with a great show of indignation, intended to conceal her real feelings. "Trouble, indeed! Father and I are only waiting until you are better to tell you how we feel about what you have done for us."

"Don't, *please*. I think I was very silly not to throw that parasol away after I saw they were safe. But I never think of the right thing until it's too late."

"How many of us do, dear. But if we try to do what we think is right at the time, we should not worry afterwards. Only for your own sake, I heartily wish you had let Jef have his prize sooner. You would have been spared much of the fright and fatigue. But come now, try to think of all the good times we shall have while Uncle Frank is here. The poor man will not have time to breathe."

She drew a low chair beside the bed and sat crooning the old southern lullabys until Mary fell asleep. But the child tossed restlessly, muttering incoherently and at times crying out in terror, so that when Mr. Marvin entered on tiptoe to see how things were progressing, his wife suggested that it would be well to send for the doctor.

"Bless your heart! I had Phil 'phone for him while you were working with her down yonder. Doctor Blackwell ought to be here any moment, but we must not frighten the child."

"I shall tell her that he is an old friend of her uncle's, which is perfectly true."

"There are the wheels on the drive, now."

The old doctor shook his head gravely when he heard the story and saw Mary's condition, for the restlessness had ceased, and she lay motionless as if perfectly exhausted.

"I am glad Doctor Carlton will be here soon. He understands her so thoroughly, that he will know better

than I what to advise. However, I brought these remedies with me, for Phil told me what he knew of the case. Keep her quiet, absolutely quiet, and the more sleep she gets the better."

He found the anxious children awaiting him on the porch.

"May I go up awhile, Doctor? asked Wilhelmina. "I won't speak a word, honestly. But she saved me and I want to see her," and the black eyes, brimming with tears, looked beseechingly into his.

"Tut, tut!" said the old man kindly, "who ever heard of two women being together for two minutes without saying a word. Here Phil, I appoint you my intern. See that Willie takes one of these powders every two hours, and be sure you get a long siesta, miss, this afternoon. Now, where's that Jack? It's a wonder there is anything left of you after the shaking up you had this morning," he said to the chubby baby, whose kicking and crowing soon convinced the doctor that he, at least, had not been at all affected by the excitement.

"I's dot a drefful tof, Doctor," spoke up Dick. "Want to hear me?"

"I'm sorry, but I haven't time to wait today, Richard. Take one of these every half hour," said the old gentleman, slipping some hoarhound drops into the dirty little palm. "Good-by children, and try to be quiet for the sake of the little girl to whom you owe so much."

How they tiptoed about the house and whispered and made signs, for the rest of the day. Harry muffled the 'phone and the dinner gong; Joe put the mocking-birds and canaries in a dark room for fear their singing would disturb the little sufferer.

"It seems like there's going' to be a funeral or somethin'," Bob confided to Frank.

"Poor father looks so worried," said Phil to Harry. "It would be awful if anything happened to her here."

"Let's get them all together in the library after lunch,

and close all the doors and windows, and say the Rosary."

Mrs. Marvin refused to leave the bedside even to go to her meals. She sent for Wilhelmina and the baby to assure herself that they had suffered no injury, and as Mary seemed to be sleeping, she allowed her little daughter the much coveted look.

"I always loved her, but not half enough," declared the impetuous child with a sob. "She'll be like our very own now. Won't the girls at school open their eyes when I tell them?"

"I should not tell them if I were you, dearie. It is better that she should not be reminded of her terrible fright. We must do all in our power to help her to forget," said Mrs. Marvin, leading the little girl to the door of the adjoining room.

"She *is* going to get better then, *isn't* she?" asked the child.

"I think so, dear, but that must be as God wills. At any rate, we must thank Him that she was not gored and trampled by that terrible Jef."

"Do you know, mother, there wasn't a sign of the bull when we went into the clover field. He must have been lying down in the long grass, and I suppose when I opened the parasol, it excited him."

"However that may be, we have much to be thankful for. Don't dwell on the thought of how terrible it all was, but, instead, thank God that mother was spared two of her darlings." She kissed the child and added, "Jef will give no more trouble. Father had Mose kill him."

"I'd give anything if I were only as brave as Mary is," sighed Wilhelmina."

"You *are* brave, little daughter."

"Oh yes, I can climb trees and do daring things to show off, but——"

"But you saved Jack today at the risk of your own

life, when many a child would have sacrificed a baby to save herself."

"Why mother! I *couldn't* have left Jack behind even if that old bull made mince-meat of me," declared the child, indignantly.

"And," continued her mother, "a coward does not tell the truth as does a little girl I know. But take a long nap now, and let me go to Mary."

Closing the door, Mrs. Marvin stole back to the bedside. She was there but a few minutes when the door softly opened again, and a woebegone little face peered in. This time the mother went into Wilhelmina's room and closed the door behind her.

"What is it, dear? You seem to be very much upset this afternoon."

"O mother," exclaimed the little girl, bursting into tears and clinging to her, "I see it all now! It's all my fault that Jef chased us and she's nearly dead; and if she dies, I'll never, *never* forgive myself!"

"My dear child, what *are* you talking about?"

"Oh, if I hadn't been so stubborn that day Phil took me to town, I'd have bought the pale blue parasol he wanted me to get, instead of that fiery thing, and then Jef wouldn't have got excited, and nothing would have happened, and—and——"

"Wilhelmina, listen to me. You *must* be quiet. If you wake Mary, you may make her worse." This threat had the desired effect, and the mother continued, "It was not your parasol that angered Jef. A white rag fluttering in the breeze would have produced the same result. I was down near the big pasture a few evenings ago, and noticing how ugly he seemed, I spoke to father about him, and father told one of the men to remove him to the small lot, away from the other animals. The man misunderstood the direction and put him in the clover field. The intense heat together with the flies, which have been particularly troublesome this year, had succeeded in almost maddening the bull, and the waving of

the clover blossoms would have been enough to infuriate him. Probably, too, the bees molested him. So don't worry about it any more, like a good child. I hear Mary stirring——"

"The doctor told Phil to give me some medicine, too."

"I shall have him bring it up to me; then I can take care of both patients. Leave this door open if you wish," said Mrs. Marvin, again returning to Mary's room.

That evening, Mr. Marvin gave unusual orders for the following morning,—a long sleep and a late breakfast. His wife insisted on remaining at her post, and it was only when the first faint gray of dawn brought the faithful Jinny with a cup of fragrant coffee, that she consented to allow the nurse to relieve her at the bedside. The child was at last sleeping naturally and the color was returning to the wan little face.

Doctor Blackwell, who arrived about ten o'clock, pronounced Mary decidedly better, and declared that by remaining in bed three or four days she would be herself again.

"But Doctor!" cried Mary in consternation, "Uncle is coming tomorrow afternoon."

"So Mr. Marvin tells me, and I shall be delighted to see him again."

"But I *must* go to meet him. He will be dreadfully anxious and disappointed if I don't."

"Hm!" said the Doctor," I cannot quite see, my dear, how you are going to stand that drive to the station and back when you are not able to walk across the floor. Mr. Marvin, I am sure, will think of some means to satisfy your uncle."

"But can't I even go down on the porch for just a little while when he comes?" she pleaded.

"I ought to say 'no' even to that, but I suppose you would fret yourself into a worse condition than an hour down there would be apt to bring on. One hour, mind, not a minute over!" insisted the old gentleman.

"Never mind, dearie," said Mrs. Marvin. "It is true that the long drive would only tire you so much that you would not be able to enjoy any of the fun we have been planning for Uncle Frank's visit."

"Will you ask the boys to fix up the wagonette just the same, even if I can't go? Uncle will enjoy it, I know. Wilhelmina and all of them must go, too."

"If you wish it, I shall tell them to do so. Father has a little business that will take him to Laurel tomorrow, where he will meet the New York train and return with Uncle Frank." She did not tell the child that her husband was making this little trip in order to acquaint the Doctor with the recent event, and to allay any anxiety the latter might feel at not finding Mary with the others at the station. "I shall instruct Wash to keep a sharp lookout and 'phone us from the lodge the instant the wagonette comes in sight. Then you can be ready to go down at the very last minute and not waste any of that precious hour waiting on the porch."

"You are wonderful for thinking up nice things to do. I don't see how I can ever thank you enough."

"My dear little girl, we owe you a debt that can never be repaid. But since you have really enjoyed your visit here, you must promise to return next year to spend the whole vacation with us."

"I should just love to—that is, if Uncle will come, too."

"Certainly dear, that is understood."

"I'm afraid he will be disappointed now if I have to keep so quiet for half the week he is to be here."

"You must not worry about that. He, too, will wish to rest for a few days. But I have a secret that I am saving until he comes, and you will see that everything will be all right. Now, I am going to have Wilhelmina come up to read to you, but if she tires you, you must send her away."

Mary, much amused at her little friend's efforts to be extremely cautious and demure, finally remarked,

"You look too funny, Wilhelmina, with that proper expression on your face. Please take it off. It's not natural."

"I feel like a soda-pop bottle with the cork ready to fly off at any minute; if my feelings begin to fizz, mother will come in and send me away. So I guess I'd better go before I do or say anything to make you worse."

"Tell Aunt Etta I've enjoyed it very much—not exactly the story, but just watching you."

"The boys are getting the wagonette ready for tomorrow, and Phil said to tell you that we'll drive around this end of the house on the way out, because, of course, you will have eyes for nothing but your uncle when we come back. Mother has told Aunt Chloe to have dinner ready the minute he gets here, and we're going to cram all the fun we can into that hour. And Mary," dropping on her knees at the bedside and clasping the thin white hand in both her strong brown ones, "I want to say something to you, but mother won't let me, now. You know, anyway." Springing to her feet, she passionately kissed the pale face and ran from the room.

On the following day, the hours seemed very long until five o'clock brought the sound of wheels to Mary's ears. Mrs. Marvin, who was helping her to dress, assisted her to the window to see the gay party drive away.

"Now, the wisest thing for you to do will be to rest again for an hour; by that time we may expect a message from Wash. Then we shall have ample time to get down to the porch."

Promptly at six the 'phone rang, and three minutes later, Jinny, with Mary in her strong arms, passed the big hall clock on the way to a large wicker rocker on the porch. Mrs. Marvin followed with sofa cushions and proceeded to make the little girl comfortable. Her graceful tact then prompted her to excuse herself on the plea of a message for Aunt Chloe, so that uncle and niece might have the first moments to themselves.

The sound of wheels was now plainly audible. With

flushed face and sparkling eyes Mary eagerly watched for the horses' heads at the turn in the drive. The moment they appeared, she rose with some difficulty from the chair, and supporting herself by resting her hand on a big white column, stood expectant at the top of the steps. Before the wagonette came to a stop, the Doctor sprang out and was up the steps with the child in his arms. The same gentle courtesy evinced by his wife, led Mr. Marvin to signal to Phil to drive around to a side door where the children were told to remain until dinner was served.

The greetings over, Uncle availed himself of the big rocker.

"It seems just like old times, doesn't it?" remarked Mary from her usual place on his knee.

"With one exception. The pale little girl I sent here four weeks ago, looks like a different being."

"I'm *so* glad you think so. I did everything I thought you would want me to do, and I've had a really good time and felt so well until——"

"Yes, yes! I know all about it, and I want to say just one thing,—I am proud of my girl. Now, for the rest, we are never going to speak or even think of it again, except to thank God that He spared you to one who, without you, would be a lonely old uncle, indeed."

"It is so good to have you," she whispered, slipping her arm around his neck. "I was afraid for awhile that day, that I was never going to see you again,——"

"A thousand welcomes, Frank," interrupted Mrs. Marvin. "You can not imagine how delighted we all are to have you here."

"Thank you, Etta, thank you. You must pardon my not rising, but this young lady has so increased in weight that she greatly impedes my actions. I shall have to charter an extra engine to take us home next week."

"Not so fast, Frank. I received a letter from your sister saying that school will not reopen until the fifteenth, so that we may keep you with us two whole weeks. Now, was that not a secret worth having, Mary?"

"That is why Aunt Mary smiled so mysteriously when I bade her good-by for a week. What will these women be up to next, eh, Mary?" giving her ear a tweak.

"I hope you stopped at Huyler's on the way to the station, Uncle. You owe me a pound, already. A half for my weight, and another for pulling my ear."

"Why, I thought I was paying you a great compliment the first time."

"Oh, I mean about the engine."

The discussion was brought to an end by the appearance of Mr. Marvin, and the four went in to dinner.

"We can hear this clock strike in the dining room, and at seven, I will have to go upstairs again," said Mary, as they passed through the hall.

"You really should be there now, but I shall not insist this time," replied the Doctor, placing her at the table in the chair next his own.

As the meal progressed, Mary felt sure that the twins were up to something, for suppressed giggles, interspersed with nudges and gestures, prevailed at their end of the table.

Dinner being finished, she observed that there must still be left a few minutes of the precious hour, and a burst of merriment greeted her remark.

"But the clock didn't strike," she protested, as all rose from the table.

"And it isn't agoin' to either," whispered Bob in her ear. "We stopped it so's you could stay down longer."

But Uncle Frank had his watch in his hand and his eyes on the culprits so there was no escape; Mary, tired, but oh! so happy, was borne away for the night. Her uncle's presence was the best of tonics, and before many days she was able to join in the sports, drives, and long horse-back rides through the country, which, to use Wilhelmina's expression, were "crammed" into the remaining two weeks of vacation.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW BOARDER.

The first week of school was at an end. It was late Saturday afternoon, and a noisy little group had gathered in the room adjoining Mary's, of which Wilhelmina was to be the happy inmate. All day the two little girls had worked, putting it in order; now they sat on the wide window-seat, listening to the enthusiastic remarks of their companions.

"It's as different from Mary's as it can be, but I like it," declared Isabel Armstrong.

"Yes, it's so odd," agreed Mabel Perry.

"Mother fixed my room at home and it's more on the order of Mary's—dainty and—oh, you know. But I like something with more dash and go to it," said Wilhelmina, looking about her with a complacent air.

"You certainly succeeded in getting it then, for I never before saw so many colors in one room," laughed Marjorie Moore, her gaze wandering from the flags of all nations, which adorned the walls, to the gay Navajo rugs.

"There's only one thing that you have forgotten, Wilhelmina."

"For pity's sake don't tell me what it is. There's so much in here now, that I'll have to go out in the hall to turn around. That's the only objection I have to this room—it's too small. I need more space so I can prance around and give vent to my feelings."

"But this wouldn't take up any room. It belongs outside."

"A door-mat," suggested Mabel.

"No—awnings. It's like an oven in here."

"So it is," agreed Wilhelmina, much relieved. "I

thought I felt warm because I had worked so hard, but if you all feel so, too, it must be the weather. Wait till you have some candy, and then we'll go to the yard. I hope you will all appreciate this," she continued, taking a box from the bureau drawer, "for I've had to practice all kinds of mortifications to save it for today. Sit down anywhere—oh! not on the *bed!!* I have to keep that spread clean for a month, and I really don't see how I'm going to do it. Might as well tell me to keep my hands clean for a whole day. I have a mind to fold it up and put it in the bureau drawer. Here, three of you will fit on this window-seat, two on each chair, and Mary and I can sit on the floor. The rugs are nice and new."

"I'd hate to have to sweep and dust this room, Wilhelmina."

"Oh indeed, it's precious little dusting I intend to give it. I'll open both windows and the door and transom, and let the breeze do the rest. Have more candy, do. And *please,* everybody make a bluff at eating some supper, or Sister won't let us treat in our rooms any more."

"Wilhelmina!"

"Now, Mary, what have I *said,* or *been,* or *done* this time?"

"You told me to remind you when you broke your promises to your mother, and you just used slang—'make a bluff.'"

"So I did. Thanks for reminding me. You see, girls, I had to promise all sorts of things before mother would let me have a room to myself, and Mary is going to help me keep my word. She'll have an awful time of it."

"I have a beautiful plan," said Isabel. "Let's have an Anti-Slang Society, and make badges of ribbon with the initials——"

"Never! never!" "Mercy, no!" "Have everyone calling us——" but the words were drowned in screams of laughter.

"You'll have to change the name, or else be the only member, Isabel."

"Dear me, I never thought of what it spelled. Call it 'Anti-Slang *Club,*' then."

"Too much like the other. I'd always see long ears flapping."

"Well, the candy box is empty and Sister will wonder what is keeping us in here," interrupted Wilhelmina. "Let's adjourn until next Saturday, and we can think up a name in the meantime."

"We have had a *grand* time, Wilhelmina, and your room is *be-yew-tee-ful.*"

"Thank you, girls, but really there isn't so much in a private room, after all. The dormitory is a pretty nice place. You don't get so lonesome there."

"If Aunt Etta heard *that* after all your teasing, I wonder what she'd think," laughed Mary.

"Why, I never knew you two are cousins," said Mabel.

"We're not; we're sisters. We've adopted each other," promptly answered Wilhelmina, casting a warning glance over her shoulder, as, with her arm about Mary, she led the way to the yard.

They found Sister Austin sitting on a bench from which she could command a view of the play-ground.

"O Sister," cried Marjorie, "do go in to see Wilhelmina's room. It's a dream!"

"I shall have to wait until Sister Damien comes to relieve me," answered the religious, smiling at the happy children. "But whom have we here?"

The girls turned and saw Mother Madeline approaching, holding a little girl by the hand.

"It must be a visitor," volunteered Wilhelmina.

"Isn't she a darling!" exclaimed Maud.

"She looks like a great big doll," said Isabel.

By this time the Superior and her little companion had reached the group.

"This is little Bertha Ashmere, Sister. You read a letter from her aunt, a few days ago. I had an idea she was older than she is. The nurse is waiting to take her home again if we think her too young."

"Oh *p'ease, p'ease* let me 'tay here," cried the little one vehemently, clinging tightly to Mother's arm. "Don't send me back to Auntie's house. I'll be as dood as nennyfing, and I tin button mine own shoes and do lots of fings mine own self. *P'ease* let me tay wif 'oo!"

It was certainly hard to resist the expression in the pleading, tearful eyes.

"But you don't know us at all, dear, and perhaps you would not be happy here," said Mother, kindly.

"Ess I will. I love 'oo yight now."

"Let us give her a week's trial, Mother—"

"Oh yes, Mother, do *please!* We will all help to take care of her," cried the little girls, crowding about the beautiful child who clung closer to her first friend.

"Will you remain here with Sister Austin, while I go to tell Lena that you will stay with us?"

"Ess, Muzzer," was the prompt reply. The child at once transferred her hold to Sister's hand. The latter lifted her to the bench, where she sat gravely regarding the girls, who strove to make friends with her and vainly coaxed her to play with them. Then she turned her eyes toward the receding form of Mother Madeline, who, accompanied by Mary, was returning to the house.

"Am all zose her chillun?" inquired Bertha, with a wave of her chubby hand in the direction of the romping groups.

"Oh no, dear, Mother Madeline is the head of this big house and we call her 'Mother.' These girls all have their own mothers, or fathers, or aunties to take care of them," explained Sister.

"My muzzer and fazer am in Hebben," continued the child gravely, "and pitty soon I is goin' to go zere, too."

"Here is a lovely piece of candy," interrupted Wil-

helmina, anxious to change the conversation to something less serious.

"Fank 'oo," said the little one. "Zat feels dood in my mouf."

"*Isn't* she dear, Sister?"

"Zose dirls make a drefful noise," was the next remark from the serious baby, who looked anxiously at Sister to see what effect the boisterous recreation was producing.

"They are having *such* a good time. Don't you want to go play with them?"

But Bertha shook her head and wriggled farther back on the bench.

In the meantime, Mother Madeline and her little niece had entered the house.

"O Auntie, you *must* see Wilhelmina's room. Go around that way some time when she isn't there, because I know you will want to laugh, and it wouldn't do to hurt her feelings."

"But why shall I want to laugh?"

"Because it's so kind of funny for a bed-room. Of course I couldn't say anything to her, but it reminds me of the inside of a circus tent."

"I must certainly take a look at it. And dearie, I know there is no need of telling you to be kind to the new little one. As in your case, both her parents are dead, and her aunt is in such poor health that she cannot bear even the noise and prattle of that little child. Then, too, she feels that Bertha should have young companions; so do what you can to make the little one happy. She is entirely too serious for one so small. But why are you coming in now?"

"I thought we might coax her to play if I got that big rubber ball of mine with the red and blue and yellow stripes on it. She seems so timid, and that would amuse her."

"Yes, do get it. Little folks like bright things."

A few minutes later, the girls saw Mary skipping toward them, bouncing the gay ball before her. As if by accident, she missed her stroke and the pretty plaything rolled across the grass toward them. With a cry of delight, Bertha slipped off the bench and seized it. Then ensued a lively game. The little child's uncertain aim sent the ball just where it was least expected, and the girls were often caught napping. When the fun was at its height, Bertha suddenly stood still, and, with a "Sh——," placed her tiny finger on her lips and tiptoed across the grass to the bench where Sister Austin sat enjoying the fun. Climbing up beside the latter, she folded her hands in her lap, saying penitently, "I fordot."

"What did you forget, dear? Weren't you having a good time with the ball, or are you tired?"

"Ess, I was having lots of fun, and I isn't tired, but we was all sqweaming loud as nennyfing."

"But that is all right, out here in the yard."

"But 'oo has a hek-ache and all ze ozzer ladies in ze house has a hek-ache and we was sqweaming."

"No dear, I haven't a headache. What makes you think I have?"

"Tause 'oo has a wite wag tied awound 'oor head, and a black fing over it, and zat's what my auntie does when she has a hek-ache, and zen she say, 'Sh——! 'Oo is a naughty dirl to make so much noise and 'oo tan't go to Hebben wif 'oor muzzer."

"Poor auntie was very sick, I am sure; but here you can run and laugh and shout, all you please. Of course, in the house they play quiet games."

"I wis' I had a yitty jink."

"And you must be hungry, too, after your long ride."

"No, not hungwy, 'tause Lena had a nice lunch in a botz—shicken, and jelly-bwead and cake and oranges; and we ate it all up and fru ze botz out ze window."

"My! that was a nice lunch, indeed. But here is

Mary. She will take you to get a drink. It will soon be supper time."

"And my hands am all 'ticky, too."

"I'll wash them for her, Sister," said Mary, who led the child toward the house.

"I loves ev'ybody here," declared Bertha.

"And we'll all love you, too. Do you know, you and I ought to be great friends, because your mother and father are in Heaven, and so are mine."

"What *is* zat?"

"What is *what?*"

"Dreat fwends."

"Oh, a great friend is someone who loves you very much, and does nice things for you, and shares her candy and good things with you, and writes letters to you when you go away—"

"I tin wite yetters. I wite 'em often to Dod and ask Him to take me to Hebben wif muzzer. I'll wite 'oo one t'mornin'."

"But we won't need to write letters, because we'll see each other every day."

In the meantime, Wilhelmina and her companions had again gathered about Sister.

"Sister, will you please do us a favor?"

"That depends on what it is."

"Oh, you can do it just as easy as anything, Sister."

"*Please* say 'yes,' Sister."

"Not until I know what it is."

"Well, I s'pose we'll have to tell it, girls," said Wilhelmina. "It's this, Sister. May Bertha sit at our table, in the vacant place next to Mary?"

"Oh yes, Sister, and we can help wait on her."

"Sister Benigna has enough little ones to take care of, already, Sister."

"*Please* let her, Sister.

"That might be an excellent plan in more ways than one," replied Sister, thoughtfully. "So young a child needs careful training, and you will all have to set her a good example, as far as table manners are concerned. Yes, I think it will be a very good plan. I see Sister Damien has arrived, so if Wilhelmina and Marjorie will come help me, I shall unpack Bertha's suit-case and get her crib ready in the dormitory."

"O girls," exclaimed Wilhelmina, half an hour later, "I wish you could see that baby's clothes. Piles of little white dresses and not a dark gingham among them. And they all have red ribbon run through them or red sashes. I wonder why she wears red?"

"Maybe she is consecrated to the Sacred Heart," suggested Mary, thinking of her own little sister.

"That must be it," agreed Wilhelmina. "At first Sister said it seemed extravagant to dress a child at school in white all the time, and then she said it was an ill wind that didn't blow good to somebody, and since Bertha's aunt insists on the white dresses and has plenty of money, the laundry work will be a God-send to that poor Mrs. Rooney. You know, the woman who lives down the road. She has a crippled boy and was here this morning, Sister says, looking for just such work. Sister promised to send her our dresses when they need to be done up for entertainments, but that will be only once in a great while; now this fine lot of things will have to be laundered every week, and I'm so glad."

Every Sunday morning the hour from ten to eleven was devoted to letter-writing. During her visit at Wilhelmina's home, Mary had made the resolution to spend this period in writing a long letter to Aunt Etta; but now, as she sat in her accustomed place near the open window, her mind traveled back over the two previous years when this hour had been one of the happiest of the whole week. For had she not spent it in pouring out her little heart to the loved mother so far away? The memory of it all was so overwhelming, that she almost decided to abandon the resolution she had made.

"But no," she declared to herself, "I said I would and I *will*," and taking up her pen, she proceeded to tell Aunt Etta all that had occurred since her return to school. Unknown to her, Sister Austin, from her place in the front of the room, had witnessed the struggle, and thinking that Mary was writing a "practice letter," as the girls called those which they did not intend to send, she resolved to excuse the child from this exercise and send her to play in the yard with Bertha and the other little ones. So when nought but the scratch, scratch of pens was to be heard, she stole down the aisle to Mary's side and whispered her permission.

"But I *am* going to send this letter, Sister. It is to Wilhelmina's mother. She has been very kind to me, and I'm going to write to her every Sunday."

"I am glad you have found such a good friend, dear, and I am sure she will enjoy your letters, especially as those Wilhelmina writes are very unsatisfactory."

"But I think she will write better ones this year. Aunt Etta thought she had improved a lot, and was so surprised to see her darn stockings."

"Wilhelmina darn stockings!"

"Oh yes, Sister, every morning for half an hour she helped her mother with the mending."

"And how about you?" asked Sister, suspecting the true state of affairs.

"I did some, too," the child admitted, "for you see, I had none of my own to mend. Aunt Mandy put only new ones in my trunk, because she won't believe I can darn, and she said she wouldn't have me be a trouble to anyone."

"Well, finish your letter. I suppose you have plenty of news."

"Yes, Sister. I'm telling about Bertha, now," replied Mary, resuming her writing.

The hour passed quickly, and at its close Mary had finished the following:

Maryvale, Sept. 20, 1907.

Dear Aunt Etta:

So many things have happened since I said good-bye to you, that I hardly know where to begin to tell about them.

When we got to New York, Tuesday morning, we went first to one of the big stores to buy the things for Wilhelmina's room, and then Uncle brought us out here. Aunt Mary was glad to see us all again, and everyone thinks I have gained. There was not much school that day. We bought our new books, and unpacked our trunks; but Wednesday the real work began. If all the weeks are as short as this one, Christmas will be here before we know it.

Yesterday we finished fixing Wilhelmina's room. It is the one next to mine, and I pound on the wall every morning so she will remember to get up at once as she promised you. We practice together a little while every day, but don't tell Uncle Phil. That is our secret, you know.

I hope he and the boys are well. I could not help thinking of Dick yesterday when a new little girl came to board. She is just about his age, and I know they would have lots of fun playing together. Her name is Bertha Ashmere, and she makes me think so much of what my Berta would have been, that it makes me lonesome. The poor little thing's father and mother are dead, too, and she has been living with her aunt, but she does not seem to love her a bit. It makes me feel how much I have to be thankful for, with Uncle and Aunt Mary and all of you to love me.

Your affectionate niece,

Mary.

As a rule, the younger children composed their letters Saturday afternoon, but this week they begged to write them without correction or help of any kind, promising to be most careful and to consult the dictionary for all

doubtful words. Sister, knowing that their parents would make allowance for the first letter of the school-year, acceded to their wishes. Whether or not she regretted the experiment, Wilhelmina's letter will prove.

Maryvale, Sept. 20, 1907.

Dearest, darlingest Father and Mother:

It seems like perfect ages since I gave you that last hug, but I have counted it all up and marked it on a little calendar and fourteen weaks from today I will be home for Christmas. We got the things for my room, they are butifool. There was some money left and Uncle Frank gave it to Sister so if I need anything. I bought a dictionary, one with red letters down the side. There is a new border, she is the sweetest darlingest little thing. She calls me Willymean. I no you will see a grate improvement in this letter because I looked up every word that I was not absoolotly sure of in my new dic. Mary says I am to go to the parlar with her every time Uncle Frank comes, so that will brake the monotone. In the dictionary that last word does not mean the same as I want it to, and it only sounds rite when you say the last *e* like some French words. Give my darling love to the boys and tell them to rite soon and to take good care of Dixie.

From your loving child,

Wilhelmina.

P. S. I forgot to say the room looks *grand.*

Willy.

P. S. Mary helped to fix it ,and I never said a word about the bull to anybody but I am dyeing to. But I won't until you say I may, cause I said I would not and I *won't.*

Wilhelmina.

It was nearly four o'clock that afternoon when Doctor Carlton arrived at Maryvale. He had walked half way up the drive, pausing now and then to watch the children at play under the trees in the distance, when he heard his name shrilly called, and looking behind him, he beheld Mary and Wilhelmina racing over the grass.

"Gently, gently, little girls! Do you realize that this is a very warm afternoon?" he protested, removing his hat and mopping his forehead.

"How did you ever get away up here? We have been watching for you over an hour, and just turned around for a minute to look for a shady bench, and you slipped by us. Aunt Mary thought you'd rather stay out under the trees, and said we could watch for you."

"And we have something good, down yonder," added Wilhelmina. "Something that will cool you off."

"I am sure Aunt Mary and both of you are very kind to trouble yourselves so much about my comfort; but really, that walk from the station is no joke, a day like this."

Chattering like a pair of magpies, the little girls led him to the bench previously selected.

"What did you do with the refreshments, Wilhelmina?"

"I put them in that bush, so no one would see them. Wait, I'll get them." Wilhelmina parted the branches of a thick lilac bush, and brought forth a pitcher and a glass. "The ice isn't quite melted, so I guess it's cool yet."

"This is a treat, I assure you," declared the Doctor, as he emptied a tumbler of lemonade. "But where are your glasses? Yes, you must have some of this, too."

"No! no! It's all for you. We had ours before we came out here. We asked Sister to use our candy money to buy lemons during the hot weather, so that is how we all happened to have lemonade today," explained Mary.

"A very sensible plan," observed her uncle. Putting

his hand into his pocket, he drew out a bill which he handed to her, saying, "Give that to Sister and ask her to let you have lemonade every day while this weather lasts."

"Oh thank you, Uncle; Wilhelmina and I would rather have it than ice cream soda, but lots of the girls wouldn't."

"It just touches the spot with me," declared Wilhelmina.

A puzzled expression came over Mary's face, and after a moment's silence she asked, "Uncle, is 'touches the spot' slang? Wilhelmina wants me to help her to stop using slang, and sometimes we don't agree on words."

"Yes, I promised mother I'd stop; but Uncle Frank, don't you think I ought to have kind of a recess about twice a day—say a half hour or so, morning and afternoon, when I could talk all the slang I want to? A person feels so bottled up trying to be proper all the time."

Wilhelmina's woe-begone expression, together with his own ideas of the child's efforts to be "proper," amused the Doctor greatly.

"But my dear little girl, in those two half hours you would probably lose more than you had gained in several hours. However, since you made the promise to your mother, why not ask her about it?"

"That's just what I'll do," exclaimed Wilhelmina, eagerly. "I'll ask Sister to give me my letter again and I'll add a postscrift. But," and the clouds once more settled on the bright little face, "She won't give it back to me, I know, 'cause I've got three postscrifts on it already."

"I haven't any, so I'll get my letter from Sister and ask for you," said Mary, sympathetically.

"Isn't she just the best one for thinking of things?" cried the delighted Wilhelmina. "And I wish I had asked Sister to let me show you my room. Mary helped me with that, too. I'll get permission to take you in

to see it the very next time you come. Remind me, Mary."

"I will. And O Uncle——"

"Oh yes, Uncle Frank, we've got—excuse me, Mary, you tell it."

"No, you tell it."

"I'll go see if I can't find her. She was taking her nap when we came out," said Wilhelmina, running off in the direction of the house.

"Well," asked the Doctor, "what have you, and who is taking her nap? You are both very mysterious."

"It's a new boarder—the dearest, sweetest, little thing you ever did see. She's only three years old and her father and mother are dead, and she has been living with an aunt; but I don't believe Bertha loves her very much, because she almost cried when Aunt Mary said she was too small to stay here. So they are going to try her for a week, and I do hope they'll keep her all the time. She didn't bring any toys, so I loaned her my big ball and the Teddy bear—things she can't break, you know. I wish you could have seen her rocking the bear to sleep a while ago. She made us all walk around on our tiptoes and wouldn't take her own nap until she had put him to bed. And she says the funniest things. I hope she's awake so you can see her. Her name is Bertha Ashmere, and her aunt lives in Albany. Do you know anyone of that name, Uncle?"

"Ashmere," repeated the Doctor thoughtfully. "Ashmere—Albany—I can't say that I do, Mary. But wait a minute—where have I heard that name? Ashmere—When was I in Albany?"

"You went up there to some kind of a meeting last May; don't you remember?"

"So I did.—Ashmere.—I have it! A friend of mine took me for an auto ride out through the suburbs where one beautiful home, in particular, attracted my attention. The painters and other workmen were busy about it, and my friend said it belonged to a southern lady who

had married an Englishman, and had lived abroad for several years. He died, and there was a rumor that she was expected home early in the summer. I am sure *Ashmere* was the name. And this very wonderful little girl is probably the husband's niece."

"You needn't be laughing, sir. You will be just as foolish about her as any of us. Here she comes with Wilhelmina, and she's still hugging Ted. *Now,* isn't she just darling!" insisted Mary, running to meet the two. "Bertha, this is my uncle. He will be another of your friends."

Freeing her little hand from Wilhelmina's grasp, the child placed it in the Doctor's big palm while she fixed her great dark eyes on the kind face above her and said gravely, "I is most happy to make 'oor 'twaintance."

"What's that!" exclaimed the good man.

Raising her voice a little, she repeated, seriously and deliberately, "I is most happy to make 'oor 'twaintance," while Mary and Wilhelmina stood by, thoroughly enjoying Uncle's amazement.

"My auntie told me I must say zat ze first time I meet peoples," continued Bertha, a little taken aback at the effect her words had produced.

"Oh, indeed!" remarked the Doctor, fully aware of the triumphant glances that were being exchanged between the other children. "And tell me," he went on as he lifted the little one to his knee, "what does your auntie wish you to say the *second* time you meet a person?"

"I don't know," said Bertha, shaking her head gravely, but still keeping her eyes fixed on his face. "She neber did say nennyfing 'bout ze *second* time. Many peoples didn't tum to see my auntie."

"Well, well! I wonder if I haven't some pennies for a good little girl," but like a flash Bertha slid off his knee and backed away with her hands behind her.

"No, no! I don't want nenny pannies. Muzzer did say 'tisn't nice for yitty dirls to take pannies from folks."

"And your mother was right, little one; but you see I have acquired bad habits, for so many girls and boys that I know will not take their medicine nor do what I wish them to do unless I give them pennies. Mary, suppose you come here and see if you can't find something in my pockets that a little girl would like."

As Mary proceeded with the search, Bertha again drew near and leaned confidingly against Uncle Frank's knee. Occasionally, instead of the ordinary box, the Doctor amused himself and Mary by having the candy put up in a number of small fancy boxes representing animals, flowers, or toys. Such was the case today. One by one, Mary laid the little packages on the bench till Bertha finally exclaimed, "Oh, so many, many pottets as he has dot. I wis' I had a pottet so I wouldn't be all ze time losing my hanklefis."

"Never mind, honey," said Wilhelmina, "I heard Sister say she is going to make pockets in all your dresses, too."

"I think I've found all of them," declared Mary. "Now Bertha, help me to open them, and you can have whichever you like best. Uncle says this one is for you, Wilhelmina. Something you're very fond of. It will make you think of old times," tossing a queer-shaped package into her little friend's lap. "Can you untie the string, Bertha?"

"I fink I tan," replied the child, eagerly. "Now it's off—see! see! oh, ze sweet yitty puss-tat!" she exclaimed, running from one to the other to show her gift. "It's head turns 'wound. Oh! I've pulled it off," she cried, on the verge of tears.

"It isn't broken, Bertha. See what is inside."

"Tandy! what a funny puss-tat wif tandy inside. My pussy at my auntie's only had a *meow* inside."

"But look at all these pretty things. Maybe you would rather have one of them," suggested Mary, drawing her attention to the array on the bench. "Here's a little drum and a rose and a bunny and a funny little man; what is yours, Wilhelmina?"

"*There was an old darkey and his name was Uncle Ned,*" sang Wilhelmina. "Isn't he just the image of old Mose down home? Even to the fiddle!"

"I like nennyfing 'oo want to give me," said Bertha, at the same time casting a wistful look at the kitten which she still held.

"But I want you to have the one you like the very best."

"Oh, zen I'll teep my yitty puss-tat, p'ease, and ev'ybody must take some tandy, and Sissoo Aus'n and all ze yitty dirls, too."

To humor her, each was obliged to take a piece of her candy.

"Now, Bertha, you and I must go, so say good-by to the Doctor," said Wilhelmina.

"*Isn't* she dear?" demanded Mary, after the two had gone.

"She is, indeed. I shall be very careful in future not to doubt the judgment of two such able critics. But it is time we were going in to see Aunt Mary."

"Doesn't Bertha remind you of someone, Uncle?" Mary asked as they neared the house. "It has puzzled me ever since I first saw her, but I can't think who it is."

"She certainly resembles someone I know. Might it be any of the Marvins?"

"I thought of them on account of her hair and eyes, but she doesn't *look* a bit like them. Perhaps Aunt Mary will know."

But though Mother Madeline, too, saw a striking resemblance to someone, she could not say to whom; and thus the child lived on unknown among her own. She was a great favorite. Even the tiniest kindergarten tot felt almost grown up in her presence, and all games and stories were chosen with a view of amusing "little Bertha." She was the subject of conversation during many a recreation hour, her quaint sayings affording

much enjoyment to the Sisters and older pupils. Were it not for her own naturally sweet disposition, the child would soon have been thoroughly spoiled. While she loved "ev'ybody," she showed a decided preference for Mary's company, and was never happier than when with the latter in her cozy room playing with the dolls and games that by degrees found their way down from the little brown trunk. To go with Mary to practice soon became a habit, and she would sit on a little chair in the corner of the music room with the bear or a doll in her arms, until, toward the end of the half hour, Mary purposely played something particularly lively, which was a signal for a grand frolic. After the children had gone to class, she followed Sister Austin about the dormitories; then, during the fine weather, the two spent the rest of the morning out under the trees, where Sister sewed, while she played near by, or paid visits to Dan and his garden, or to Patrick and the chickens.

One bright morning, a day or two before the Feast of the Guardian Angels, which was always a great day at Maryvale, Sister noticed that Bertha was unusually preoccupied. Heedless of the toys strewn about her on the grass, the child sat gazing wistfully at the distant hills.

"It seems to me a little girl I know is very quiet today," observed Sister.

"I was finking," answered Bertha, rising and drawing near, until she leaned against Sister's knee.

"And of what were you thinking, dear?"

"I was finking if I will soon be dood enough to go to Hebben wif muzzer," and the little face worked painfully. "Does 'oo fink so, Sissoo?"

"But what would your good auntie do without you if God should take you to Heaven?"

"I *hasn't* nenny dood auntie," insisted Bertha vehemently. "She am a *bad* auntie. She wouldn't let me go wif muzzer and yitty sissoo, and muzzer she say 'tum,' and auntie tweezed me tight so I touldn't go, and I want to go to muzzer yight now, I do, I do!" she cried, the tears rolling down the pathetic little face.

"But auntie couldn't let you go, darling, unless God took you," urged Sister, taking the child on her lap and trying to calm her.

"Ess she tould. Muzzer was in ze yitty boat and talled me. But oh! oh!" she exclaimed, clapping her chubby hands over her mouth and looking fearfully about her. "I fordot! My auntie she did say if I talk about zat I is bad and tan't go to Hebben wif muzzer. And now," with a wail of distress, "I is bad——"

"No, dear, you are not bad at all. You did not mean to disobey your auntie."

Kind-hearted Sister Austin could not understand why the little one had been forbidden to speak of her mother; but concluding that Mrs. Ashmere had wise reasons for the prohibition, she tried to divert Bertha's mind from the painful topic.

"Have you visited the chickens, today? I saw Patrick going down that way a little while ago. Poor, old Teddy needs exercise, too. Take him with you, and I shall come after you when it is time to go in."

As Bertha trotted away, Sister watched her until a corner of the house hid her from view. Then she took up the sewing again, wondering, meanwhile, why Mrs. Ashmere had used so severe a threat to prevent the little girl's thinking of her mother's funeral; for, like the stewardess, she interpreted the "little boat" as the coffin. Suddenly her train of thought was interrupted by a loud cackling mingled with Bertha's piercing screams. Fearing lest Patrick had not gone to the chicken yard, as she had supposed, and that the child was in some mischief, she hastened in the direction whence the sounds proceeded. As she turned the corner of the house, she beheld Bertha running toward her screaming at the top of her voice and holding her hands tightly over her ears.

"Tum twick! tum twick!" cried the child frantically, as soon as she caught sight of the religious. "Zat naughty bad Patwick is chopping ze heads off all ze pitty shickies, and zey is jumping around wifout nenny

heads. *P'ease, p'ease* make him stop!'' and she hid her face in the folds of Sister's habit, sobbing aloud at the fate of her pets.

''But Bertha, the girls are going to have chicken for dinner on the Feast Day, so Patrick has to kill them before they can be cooked. You like chicken, too. You told me you do, don't you remember?''

''Zat was meat shicken, not pitty birdies wif fezzers on,'' she protested between her sobs.

''Well, you wait until those chickens are cooked and you will see what good meat chicken they will make.''

''I won't eat nenny of zem,'' declared the child with a vigorous shake of her head.

At the dinner table she rehearsed for the girls the tragedy of the morning, and in mournful tones announced that, later on, when passing the kitchen door, she ''saw the Sissoos peeling the shickens.''

But the fine October days came to an end, and November set in cold and rainy. One stormy afternoon while paying a visit to Mary in her room, Bertha spied the latter's umbrella and remarked in her most coaxing tones, ''I wis' I had a yitty umb-yella.''

''I would lend you that one, Bertha, but it is too big to play with. You might poke it in your eyes.''

The child gave the much coveted article another wistful glance; then turned to the toys within reach. But Mary did not forget the little one's wish, and that evening she wrote the following note to Uncle Frank:

Dear Uncle:

The next time you come out, will you please bring two things? A little ten-cent broom, and a small parasol. Pink, or blue, or red. I want them for Bertha.

Your loving

Mary.

Quite late Wednesday afternoon, she received word that the Doctor was waiting to see her. Feeling sure he would not disappoint her about the toys, she took Bertha with her to the parlor. On a chair lay a long package, and as Mary greeted her uncle she whispered, "Don't give them to her until Aunt Mary comes. I want her to see the fun."

They had not long to wait for Mother Madeline, and when all were again seated Mary began, "Uncle brought you something all for yourself today, Bertha. Come over here and see if you can open this big package."

"All zis for me!" exclaimed the child, her eyes shining with expectancy as she tried to untie the cord. With Mary's assistance she soon had it off, and as she pulled at the paper the little broom fell to the floor.

"See! see!" she cried, clapping her hands. "A yitty beum, a yitty beum!" and picking it up, she danced gleefully about the room. "Now I tan help Sissoo sweep ze whole house!"

"A large amount of pleasure for ten cents," laughed Uncle.

"Yes, indeed. A cheap little thing like that often means more to a child than the most expensive toys," said his sister.

"But Bertha, there is something else here," urged Mary.

"Sumpin *else!*" and as the little one unwrapped the paper, her face became pale with excitement.

"Oh, oh!" she gasped when the pink parasol finally lay exposed to view. "A yitty umb-yella! A beauty, yitty *umb-yella!*"

"Uncle, this is better than if you brought me a whole bushel of beautiful things," declared Mary.

"It is certainly pleasant to have one's gifts so highly appreciated," laughed the Doctor. "I was very much afraid that I should have to disappoint you about the parasol; for everywhere I went I was told that such things had been put away until next season. So I had

made up my mind that you would have to be contented with the broom, when at noon today Liza handed me that gay affair. She found it in a little up-town shop."

"Do tell her how much fun we have all had over it. Here Bertha," turning to the child who stood at Mother Madeline's side pointing out the lace ruffles and bows of ribbon on her new treasure, "let's open it and see how it looks. You must be careful not to pinch your fingers."

Bertha had no words left to express her admiration, and stood looking first at one, then at another. Suddenly she ran to Uncle Frank, and scrambling up on his knee, threw her arms about his neck, exclaiming, "Oo is *dood, dood,* to bring me such beauty fings!" Then sliding down again to the floor, she danced about Mary, crying, "*Oo* told him, *'oo* told him, I know 'oo did! Tum here till I love 'oo," and Mary willingly stooped for the hug which she returned with real affection.

"You have made that little child very happy by your thoughtfulness, dear," said Mother Madeline a short while later, when she and Mary stood at the office door watching Bertha, who was farther down the hall displaying her treasures to one of the Sisters.

"I sometimes wonder why I love her so, Aunt Mary. Maybe it is because she has no father or mother, either. But oh! wouldn't it be lovely if we had our very own to do nice things for?"

"But, dear child, our very own are so much happier than we could ever make them. Think what it means to be safe with God, forever and ever," replied the religious, stroking the yellow head that leaned against her arm. "I feel great pity for this little one who seems so much alone in the world. She has no affection whatever for her aunt, and, as far as I know, has no other relatives. Her nurse, Lena, who has remained with the aunt, was here this morning and said Mrs. Ashmere's health is failing so rapidly that the doctors give her only a few months to live. What will life be for that

poor little child with no one of her own to care for her? Of course, she will be well provided for, and a guardian will be appointed to look after her, but those are minor things compared to the affection which a child needs," and Mother's eyes again rested on the happy baby at the end of the hall. After a short pause she continued, "You might like to know a thought which came to my mind when I saw you playing together in the parlor, a little while ago. It is this—that perhaps our dear Lord has sent this little girl into your life that you may give her the care and affection you would have lavished on your own little sisters."

"O Auntie, do you really think that? I would be so glad if I could make poor little Bertha happy. Often, when she does not know I'm watching, she sits and looks away off as if she is thinking of something, and one day she began to tell me about her mother's funeral and she kept calling the coffin a little boat; and then she got frightened and cried, because she said her auntie didn't want her to talk about her mother. I don't see how it can be wrong for a little girl to talk about her own mother, do you?"

"Mrs. Ashmere could not have meant that it was wrong, but she probably does not wish the little one's thoughts to dwell on such sad things. I expect to go to Albany, Friday, on business, and I shall call to see Bertha's aunt. Though the child is a Catholic, she is not—has no religion whatever—and, as Lena says, it is an awful thing to see one on the verge of eternity making no preparation to meet her God. So you must ask the girls to pray for a special intention. By the way, I found such a pretty little picture of Saint Agnes, today, and I put it one side for Bertha. Call her in here," said Mother Madeline, crossing the room to her desk.

"Here is a picture of Saint Agnes, dear," she said to the child. "Do you know what she has in her arms?"

"A yitty yamb. And Maywy had a yitty yamb, too, Muzzer. Ze piczer book say so. Did 'oo weally have a yitty yamb, Maywy, wif fyeece as wite as snow?"

"Oh no, that was some other Mary. I never had a little lamb."

"It feels like I is detting all ze pitty fings today, and poor Maywy isn't detting nennyfing."

"That is so," agreed Mother Madeline. "Let me see if I haven't something nice here for her, too. How will this little medal do?"

" 'Oo like zat?" inquired Bertha of Mary. "Zen say 'fank 'oo,' and we will go down 'tairs and show our fings to Sissoo Aus'n and ze dirls."

"Suppose we wrap up the parasol and broom again so they won't know what in the world you have," suggested Mary.

"And 'oo tan play wif ze yitty umb-yella and sweep 'oor room wif ze yitty beum whenever 'oo like," declared Bertha in a final burst of generosity.

As they passed down the hall together she exclaimed, "Oh, I wis I had a nice uncle and auntie like 'oors."

"Why, I'll tell you what we can do. I'll give you half of Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary, and you give me half of your auntie."

" 'Oo tan have *all* of her. I don't want nenny of her at all," declared Bertha, promptly.

"I don't think that's very nice for a little girl to say about her good auntie."

"But she *isn't* a dood auntie—she's *bad, bad!*" cried the child, piteously. "Muzzer did say I *has* a dood uncle and auntie and a bid sissoo, but Aunt Berfa she say, 'No, zey am all gone to Hebben wif muzzer.' "

Mary listened intently. An uncle, an aunt, a sister! Oh, Aunt Mary must know as soon as possible so as to make the necessary inquiries at Albany. Not that the little girl in the least suspected Bertha's identity, but the thought that the child possibly had relatives to care for her, made her very happy.

"Let us sit here on the stairs a little while, Bertha. What is your uncle's name and where does he live?"

"Why, his name am just Uncle, and muzzer neber did say where he live. Aunt Berfa did say zey all went to Hebben wif muzzer, but zey wasn't in ze yitty boat wif her when she went way, way down in ze dark," declared the child, beginning to cry. Suddenly she threw her arms about Mary, while she looked around in every direction, exclaiming, "Oh, I fordot aden! I is always fordetting. Auntie will say I is bad and tan't go to Hebben!" and, wailing at the top of her voice, she clung tightly to the older child. Mary was indignant.

"You're *not* a bad girl. You're the best little girl in the house, and I think it's a big shame to frighten a poor baby that way. Sh! Sh! don't cry like that dear. You'll have all the Sisters down here to see what's the matter. We'll talk about Uncle Frank. You know he is going to be half yours, now."

"Tan I have ze half wif his tick-tock on?" inquired the little one, beginning to smile through her tears.

"Yes, you can sit on his left knee and play with his watch, and you may have all the candy and goodies in the pockets on that side. But come, let us go down and show Sister and the girls your parasol."

"And ze yitty beum," added Bertha.

As they entered the recreation room, the younger children crowded round them, clamoring to see what was in the big package; but Bertha waved them back with, "*Jes* a minute, dirls! *Jes* a minute!" then proceeded toward the opposite side of the room, where Sister was sitting. The gesture, the words, the tone were so like Sister Austin's, that the children screamed with merriment. Bertha paid no heed, and laying the long bundle on Sister's lap, said briefly, "Sumpin Maywy's Uncle bwought me."

After Sister Austin had expressed her admiration to Bertha's entire satisfaction, the child turned to the little girls with a wave of her hand, announcing, "Now ev'ybody tan tum see."

The rapturous exclamations which greeted the pink

parasol were quite after the little one's own heart, and she beamed graciously on all her friends. Then turning again to Sister she cried, "And Sissoo, Maywy did say zat I tan have half of her uncle and auntie; and ven he tums, I is going to sit on one of his knees, and Maywy on ze ozzer, and he will put one arm awound me, and ze ozzer one awound her, and she tan talk into one ear, and I tan talk in ze ozzer one, and he will look at me wif one eye and at her wif——"

But a shout from the children drowned the rest of the sentence.

"O Sister," begged Marjorie Moore, "do let us all peep into the parlor the next time the Doctor comes. Just imagine the poor man trying to look two ways at once," joining the others in a hearty laugh.

"Why for zey is all laughing so loud, Sissoo?" demanded Bertha, indignantly.

"Don't mind them, dear. Marjorie is a great tease."

"I wis' it will be waining, t'mornin,' so I tan go out wif my yitty umb-yella."

"You surely don't mean to take that pretty thing out in the rain!" cried Wilhelmina. "Why, it would be ruined!"

"But ven will I play wif it, zen?" inquired Bertha, a cloud of disappointment spreading over her radiant little face.

"We'll play with it right now," insisted Isabel, anxious to avert the gathering storm. "We'll make a house out of these chairs, so—and this opening will be the front door. We'll pretend that it's raining like everything, and you're my little girl who must go out to buy something for supper."

In a moment, under Isabel's direction, all the little folks were engaged in a game of pretend.

Meanwhile, Mary and Wilhelmina drew their chairs near Sister Austin and entered into an important conversation.

"Uncle was asking for you, Wilhelmina; but he stayed only a short time while you were at your music lesson, so Aunt Mary thought I'd better not go for you. He's coming again, Sunday, and wants us to decide before then what we'd like to do about Thanksgiving. I told him that we are going to have just one day so as to make a longer vacation at Christmas, and he said he will either send Liza out for us Thursday morning so we can spend the day in the city, or else he'll come out here for the whole afternoon. Now, which would you rather do?"

"A whole day in the city would be lots of fun," replied Wilhelmina, thoughtfully, "and then again, the time it would take to get in there and back here before supper wouldn't leave much of a day after all. We would probably have a better time if he came out here."

"That's just what I think. Do you know, I can hardly believe Thanksgiving is so near—just a week from tomorrow. Christmas will be here before we know it. When are we going to begin to make presents, Sister?"

"Some of the large girls have already completed quite a number. How many do you intend to make?"

"Well, first of all, there's Uncle. What do you think I could make for him? It's so hard to know what to give a man. What are you going to make for your father, Wilhelmina?"

"Now Mary, such a question! You know I can't make anything fit to be seen. Why, I heard the boys talking to mother about the stockings I had darned, and Harry said they ought to be ranked among the foremost corn-producing states of the Union. No, indeed, I'll not inflict any of my needle-work on poor father. Other years, I always had a little bank and saved enough to buy some nice presents, but," with a doleful sigh, "all my money this year has gone to pay the fines I owed the Club. I think some allowance ought to be made for a girl with eight brothers, even if she talked slang all the time."

"Where did you little girls get the idea that Christmas presents must always be made with a needle? If I were you, I should take those drawings you showed me the other day, fasten them together in book form, and make a cover for them. You can decorate that prettily, too, and I am sure no one would want a nicer gift."

"And it would be just as much our own work as embroidery or crocheting would be," said Mary.

"Of course it would. Then, too, it will save your eyes. The days are so short that, as it is, you have to use them quite enough by artificial light."

"Today, in drawing class, Sister said something about having us make calendars. They will do for presents, too," said Wilhelmina. "I shall make mine for father."

"So they will. I think I'll make three. One for Aunt Mary—it will be my own work, and a very useful thing for her."

"Useful! I should say calendars are useful. Every night before I go to bed, I scratch off another day on the one that hangs in my room. It seems to make the time pass quicker. There are only about ten days left in this month, and the Friday before Christmas will be the twentieth, and that night I'll be on my way home," exclaimed Wilhelmina, clapping her hands gleefully.

"To whom will you give the other calendars you intend to make, Mary?" inquired Sister.

"One to the chaplain—Father Hartley is so good to us, Sister—and the third is for some particular friends," replied Mary, nodding toward Wilhelmina and framing with her lips the words, "for her father and mother."

But her little friend's attention was directed to Bertha, who for some moments had been a silent listener to the conversation. The latter now began, "I want to make a Twismas pwesent for somebody."

"What would you like to make, Bertha?" asked Sister, much amused.

"I want to make ze most beauty fing I tan for my dweat fwend, but it's a secwet. I want to bedin yight

now. I is tired playing house. Tan't find nennyfing to buy for supper."

"Well," said Wilhelmina, "tell Isabel the stores are all closed and that we have invited both of you to take supper with us. Then come back here and we'll decide what present you can make for your great friend."

As Bertha, still clutching the parasol, pattered away, she continued, "What in the world can a baby like that make? And can you imagine her keeping a secret?"

"I wonder if Helen or some of the kindergarten children could teach her to make those paper baskets or lanterns. Still, I am a little afraid to trust Bertha with scissors," said Sister.

"O Sister, I know the very thing," cried Mary. "Do you remember the book that came with my paints? You know it has pictures already drawn in it, and maybe Bertha could color them."

"But how could so small a child manage water-colors?"

"I meant for her to use crayolas, Sister. I'll get the book to show you. There are pictures enough in it to keep her busy for weeks."

Mary ran off, returning after a few moments with the book.

"See, Bertha," she said to the child, who had again joined the group, "wouldn't you like to paint all these pictures for that great friend of yours? He'll think this book a beautiful present."

"I'll paint 'em all tonight afore I go to fleep," declared Bertha. "I'll bedin yight now."

"You had better have some supper first. There is the bell," said Sister, rising.

"Will 'oo show me how yight after supper, Maywy?"

"Let us wait until study hour. I have learned all my lessons for tomorrow, so I'll ask Sister to let you come up to the study-hall with me; then we'll color the first picture in the book."

The study period found the two busy over a large rose.

"What color do you want to make it, Bertha?"

"Bew," was the prompt reply.

"But who ever heard of a blue rose? They are red, or pink, or white, or yellow; but never blue. Let's make it pink. We'll have to use the red crayola and just put it on lightly; then we'll have pink. See," and Mary proceeded to give Bertha her first art lesson.

"Oh, let me do it, Maywy, *p'ease* let me! I tan do it all mine own self. I is detting to be a bid dirl, Maywy. *P'ease* let me do it. Give me ze yitty wed stick and let *me* do it."

"I'd better finish this petal and you can do all the others."

But Bertha wriggled impatiently until she got the red stick into her own hands.

"He'll fink zis am a most beauty pwesent, I jes' know he will," she murmured, as, kneeling on the seat, she worked away vigorously at the drawing on the desk before her. Judging from the energy that was being expended, Mary concluded that the pink rose was fast becoming an American Beauty of the deepest hue. After quite a while there was a pause; then the perfect stillness of the room was broken by a long-drawn sigh, followed by a loud whisper which provoked a general titter.

"I isn't detting to be so bery bid, Maywy."

The pleading tone was more than Mary could resist. With one arm around the child and the little hot moist hand in hers, she carefully guided the crayola over the remaining petals.

"Now, we must make the leaves and stem green and the thorns brown. Then it will be finished."

Another deep sigh announced the completion of the work of art.

"We'll put it away in the box until tomorrow, and

after practice I'll show you how to do the bunnies on the next page. There is Sister Benigna looking for you. I guess it's bedtime.''

Kissing the tired, flushed, but happy little child, she bade her good-night, privately resolving to offer her Rosary every day that the missing relatives might be found.

The following morning at breakfast, consternation took possession of all hearts. *Bertha was missing!* Sister Austin had tapped the bell and had made the dire announcement, at the same time inquiring whether anyone had seen the child that morning. As no one had, she went on to explain that when Sister Benigna had gone as usual after Mass to call the small children who slept in the nursery, as their dormitory was termed, Bertha was not to be found. She had dressed herself and disappeared with the pink parasol, but a most thorough search of the house had failed to reveal her hiding place, neither was she visible from the windows. It had snowed all night and the great soft flakes, mingled with rain, were still falling heavily. Several of the girls, among them Wilhelmina and Mary, volunteered to make another search of the building, and Sister Austin chose half a dozen of the seniors as more likely to proceed in an orderly manner.

Disappointed and heavy-hearted, Mary sat down again to breakfast. What could have happened to Bertha? She felt sure that the child was not in the house, for it was so large and bright that it admitted of no good hiding-places for even an indoor game of *hide and seek.* Then, too, Bertha was not one to hide away in corners. As to being out of doors, that was altogether out of the question. She knew that the little one would not put her nose outside on such a morning. Suddenly, the thought of the child's disclosures of the previous evening flashed through her mind. Was it possible that the unknown relatives might try to gain possession of her? and was that the reason why Mrs. Ashmere was so strict about the little one? Might someone

have slipped in and taken her while all but the inmates of the nursery were at Mass? But surely, no one would stop long enough to dress the child, and Sister said that her clothes and even the parasol were gone. She was revolving these thoughs in her mind when she was startled by a cry from Wilhelmina, who ran to the nearest window, then called, "Sister! girls! come quickly! Such a sight! I caught a glimpse of something pink passing this window, and there she is. Don't let her see you watching her."

Giving her place to another girl, Wilhelmina darted from the room, closely followed by Mary. When the two reached the door leading to the yard, they paused to watch the queer little figure far down the walk, which ran so close to the building as to be invisible from the windows upstairs. Bare-headed; an old black shawl of one of the Sisters clasped tightly about her neck, its ends trailing gracefully in the slush on the walk; her feet thrust into a pair of rubbers many sizes too large, which flapped as she walked and sent the water flying in every direction; the gay parasol held jauntily aloft—such was the picture presented by Bertha out for her constitutional.

"Bertha Ashmere, come in here this minute!" shouted Wilhelmina; but the child gave the dark curls a decidedly negative shake and went on down the walk. Wilhelmina saw that coaxing was necessary.

"O Bertha! Pan-cakes for breakfast; if you don't come, they'll be all eaten up, and you won't get any."

There was a sudden halt in the steady gait as if the culprit were deliberating; but present joys were evidently too alluring, and the promenade was continued.

"I'll go out and *make* her come in. She'll have her death of cold," declared Wilhelmina.

"Wait a minute. I think I know something that will bring her."

Making a trumpet of her hands, Mary called, "Your

little umbrella will be all spoiled, Bertha. You'd better come!"

With a wail of dismay, Bertha faced about and made all possible speed towards the door; but the clumsy rubbers so greatly impeded her progress that she finally kicked them off, leaving them after her on the walk.

"Didn't I tell you last night not to take that parasol out in the rain " demanded Wilhelmina, dragging the child up the steps and depositing her with a vigorous shake on a chair near the radiator.

" 'Oo—didn't—say—nennyfing—'bout—snow!" insisted Bertha, between sobs. "O Maywy, 'oo doesn't fink it am *all* spoiled, does 'oo?"

"I think I can fix it, so don't cry. Come upstairs with me and get dressed properly. Your slippers are soaked."

"I jessed mine own self and bwushed mine own hair."

"It looks like it. You're a sight to behold!" exclaimed Wilhelmina, going off into a fit of laughter.

"What *is* zat?" demanded Bertha, not knowing whether to consider it a compliment or not.

"What is *what?*" asked Mary.

"*Sight to 'hold,* what Willy-mean did say."

"It means *a perfect show,*" laughed Wilhelmina. "Oh! just wait until Sister Austin sees you!"

"I don't want Sissoo Aus'n to see me if I don't look nice. She'd be on ze shock."

The two older children looked questioningly at each other.

Bertha hastened to explain, "Zat's what Sissoo did say ven Willy-mean did tlimb ze twee. She did say, 'Willy-mean, tum down! I is on ze shock at such 'havior in a dweat bid dirl like 'oo!"

"Well, there'll be more than Sister Austin *on the shock* at your behavior, young lady. If you don't hurry and get dry clothes on you, they will be sending for the doctor and the priest before night."

"I'll take her up to Sister Benigna, and you tell Sister Austin where I am. I've had all the breakfast I want," said Mary.

"You hardly ate a thing. I watched you," declared Wilhelmina.

"Oh, I was so afraid she was gone, Wilhelmina. I didn't know how much I love her until they said she couldn't be found. Come, Bertha."

As the two went up the stairs together, Wilhelmina skipped away towards the refectory. She had not gone far when there floated down over the banisters, "Willy-mean, p'ease save me some panny-takes!"

CHAPTER XI.

A WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS GIFT.

"Good-by, Sister! Good-by, everybody! Wish you all a merry Christmas! Hope everyone will have as jolly a time as I expect to have myself," cried Wilhelmina, catching up her little leather satchel and stooping to give Bertha a last hug. "Good-by, you old sugar-plum! I wish I could take you with me. Wouldn't mother give you the best coddling ever was? Mary! Please mark off the last day, the twentieth, on my calendar. It hangs near the window in my room. I meant to do it, but forgot. I'm so rattled!"

"Fine! Fine!" cried several of the club members.

"Now girls, have pity on me this once. Besides, I can't pay it. I'm broke. Goodness! there's another. But truly, I haven't a cent. I'm only carrying this purse for show. If father hadn't sent Mrs. Farley a check for my ticket, I'd have to either borrow from Mother Madeline or else walk home. Make out a bill for the fines I owe and send it to father. I want all my debts paid before New Year's Day. Sister, please may Mary come with me to the parlor? I never met Mrs. Farley, and she'll help to break the ice."

"I do wish you were coming, Mary," she continued as they hurried through the hall together. "They'll all be so disappointed."

"I want you to explain to Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta just how it is. I wrote to them, Sunday, but you can tell them better. Of course, while I know Aunt Mary thinks a lot of me and misses me when I go away, still she has all the Sisters to keep her company. But Uncle has only me, and he always comes out here for the Midnight Mass, and then he goes down to the Chaplain's house and comes back in the morning for the other Masses. We have breakfast together, and he usually

stays here with me most of the day, or maybe in the afternoon we go in to the city and I stay with him for a few days. There are some little girls he likes to have me visit, and they come to see me, and he takes me to places, and we always have such a good time together. So, you see, I really couldn't think of leaving him."

"I wonder what mother will say to these beauties," said Wilhelmina, stroking the handsome muff, which, with the collar, was her gift from Uncle Frank and Mary. "I never owned a set of furs in my life. It is too warm for them down home, but I tell you they are mighty comfortable in this awful climate."

"I didn't know whether you cared for mink, but I thought it would go well with your black velvet coat and hat."

"There isn't anything I like better. But here we are —do say something so I won't feel like such a goose. Imagine traveling with a person you never met before."

"But I went *all* the way with Uncle Phil, though I had never met him before, and we had a beautiful trip," urged Mary, reassuringly.

"Oh, that was different," declared Wilhelmina, as they entered the parlor.

Mother Madeline was there to introduce them to Mrs. Farley, a friend of Mrs. Marvin's, in whose company Wilhelmina was to travel as far as Richmond, Virginia. There she would meet Phil and Harry and continue the journey with them.

"I do not like to hurry you," said Mother Madeline, consulting her watch, "but if you miss the next train, you will not be able to make the desired connections in New York. You little girls were a long time saying your parting words."

"No, indeed, Aunt Mary, we said them all on our way through the hall. The elastic came off Wilhelmina's hat at the last minute, and Sister insisted on sewing it."

"Yes, I wanted to pin it to save time, but Sister was shocked at the idea," added Wilhelmina.

"Poor Wilhelmina!" laugher Mother, "I can easily imagine how happy you are to escape for awhile from all these rules and regulations."

"It *will* be nice to sleep until daylight, and not to go to bed with the chickens," responded the child merrily.

"Good-by, dear. God bless you," said Mother. "Remember me to all at home, and tell them I wish them every Christmas joy and blessing."

"May I run down to the gates with them, Aunt Mary? The walks are dry."

"But I fear you will take cold without your wraps. Here—put this shawl around you. Now you may go."

By six o'clock that same evening, all but ten of Maryvale's one hundred and fifty boarders had gone home for the holidays, and it was a wistful-looking little group that sat around the supper table. Of these, the eldest was fourteen, and three were under seven. Several of them, like Mary, had really no homes of their own, and the others lived, one in Vancouver, another in San Francisco, and a third, little Maria Valdez, in South America. The large refectory was closed and a table was set in the adjoining lunch room, which was already prettily decorated with ivy and holly.

"I have such an interesting story to read to you after supper," announced Sister Austin, brightly, "and tomorrow and the days following I have any amount of work for you older girls to do in the recreation room. I shall need Bertha, Helen, and Josephine upstairs, but I suppose you can get along without them, can't you Margaret?" to the tall girl at the head of the table, who shared with Mary the honor of having spent three Christmas vacations at Maryvale.

"Yes, Sister, if you need them," replied Margaret, with a knowing smile.

Some of the others who were away from home for the first time and knew nothing of the fun in store for them, looked rather downcast at the prospect of beginning the holidays with work of any kind; but the sud-

den brightening of the faces about them, relieved their minds of all anxiety.

The Sisters did all in their power to prevent the children from giving way to loneliness, and old Dan took it upon himself to provide the largest and finest tree that he could find in the country round. Uncle Frank insisted on sending the trimmings, which consisted not only of the regulation tinsel ornaments, candy, and popcorn; but of nuts and fruits—white grapes, pears, oranges, and great bunches of raisins—besides presents for each little girl, which had been carefully selected by him and Mary one memorable Saturday when they went shopping together. The getting these things ready was the work alluded to by Sister Austin, and thus it was that on the morning of Christmas eve, the seven little girls sat about a large table in the recreation room, filling the last of the fancy boxes and tarlatan bags.

"Do we have the tree in here?" inquired Catharine Ford.

"Yes, up at that end in the big bay window. We all hang our stockings around the chimney at the other end, and in the morning, after the third Mass, we come down here and get our presents before we go to breakfast," explained Margaret.

"But I thought we had Midnight Mass," said Isabel.

"We do. Mary, you begin at the beginning, and go through the program for them," said Margaret. "I can't work and talk, and you can. By the way, did the last one in lock the door? We don't want those three babies surprising us at this work."

"Yes, I locked it, but they are too busy in the dormitory to think of coming down here. They have all their stockings spread out on their cribs, and they're measuring to see which one is the biggest. I didn't tell them Sister has an immense tarlatan one for each of them. Just as well to keep them out of mischief one way as another," declared Florence Berkeley.

"Mary, do tell us all that we are going to do."

"Well," began Mary, "when we finish here, if it is eleven o'clock, we are going up to the Chapel to get ready for Confession, because Father Hartley wants to hear us this morning so as to leave the afternoon for the people in the neighborhood. You know there is no church in the village, and that is why the few Catholics come here to Mass. After dinner we get our clothes ready for tomorrow. We don't have to wear our uniforms, but can put on any dress we like. Most of the girls don't bring anything but their uniforms and a white dress for entertainments, so we always wear the white ones Christmas. But if you have one you like better, you can wear it. After we get our things all spread out and see that there are no buttons off our shoes and all that, we can go out to play if we want to, but sometimes Sister needs some of us to help her in the sacristy or about the crib."

"Oh, I hope I'll be one of those to help her," cried Catherine.

"Sister asked me to come up today for awhile, but you can go in my place, if you like. Uncle Frank phoned this morning and wants me to attend to something for him, and that will be the only time I can do it. Now, where was I? Oh, yes! Then about half past three, Patrick drives around with the big old sleigh, and we all squeeze in and go with him to leave Christmas baskets at the homes of the poor. By the way, we must decide on the hymns and songs. We all get out of the sleigh at each house, and stand outside the door and sing. When we get back here, we just have time before supper to hang up our stockings. Santa Claus comes here early."

"Pooh! Santa Claus!" cried Florence, the youngest of the group.

"All right! You just wait till tonight. If you don't believe in Santa Claus after what you see *then* ——" said Margaret.

"Well, I won't, so you needn't be trying to fool *me*," declared Florence.

"We'll see."

"At five o'clock," continued Mary, "we have supper. Then Sister reads about the first Christmas night, and at half-past six we go to bed so as to be ready to get up for the Midnight Mass. Sister calls us about a quarter past eleven, and oh! you never were at anything so grand as the Midnight Mass. After it is over, we have a nice lunch, then we go back to bed, and at six o'clock we get up for the other two Masses; after that we come down here to get our presents."

"Oh! I wonder if my box came," cried Edith Burns.

"Yes, it did. I saw it in the room next to the office. It's a great, big one; but *Bertha's!* she'll need a stocking as big as a seven league boot to put her things in."

"You girls that talk about Santa Claus," interrupted Florence, "what about all these things that Sister said Mary's uncle sent?"

"But Doctor Carlton is one of Santa Claus' assistants; didn't you know that?" cried Margaret. "He helps to look after this place and one of the big hospitals in the city. Dan is an assistant, too. Just you wait!"

At this moment they were startled by a loud knock at the door.

"For goodness' sake, girls!" cried Isabel, "don't open it till we cover up these things."

"It can't be those little ones," insisted Mary. "They would never stop to knock."

A deep voice from the hall reassured them. Margaret opened the door.

"Oh, come in, Dan," she cried, as the little bent figure of the gardener appeared in the doorway. He entered, dragging a huge tree.

"What a beauty!" exclaimed the children. "Did you ever see one so grand!" These and similar remarks caused the old gardener to beam on the little group.

"I suppose you want it in its usual place, Miss Mary. Yes, I see you have the stand ready," he said, proceeding to the far end of the room, where he set the tree

firmly in the opening in the center of what seemed to be a circular metal box. "Now, wind her up, Miss Mary, and let's see if she's in good order. If she needs oiling or anything, now's the time to do it; not tonight when the little old gentleman himself appears on the scene," he continued, winking knowingly at the eager curious faces about him.

Mary crept in under the low-spreading branches and turned something on the circular box. She had hardly rejoined the children, who stood in silent expectancy, when the new-comers among them were surprised to hear, issuing from the box, the sweet strains of the *Adeste*. At the same time, the great tree began slowly to revolve.

"It's beautiful just as it is without any of the things on it," cried Mary, clapping her hands delightedly. "It' the very finest one we have had, Mr. Daniel."

"Right you are, Miss Mary. I've had my eye on that same tree for five years past, and you'll search the mansions of New York City, from Battery Park to Fordham, without finding one to compare with it," declared Dan, rubbing his horny old hands gleefully as he turned to leave the room. Mary accompanied him to the door.

"Mr. Daniel, do you think you could spare an hour or so this afternoon to help me attend to an errand for Uncle? Aunt Mary said to ask you. He has sent a big wooden box of things for Mrs. Rooney and her poor crippled boy, and I thought we could put it on my sled and take it down there after dinner."

"To be sure we can, any time you say."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Daniel. Suppose we go about two o'clock. The box is in the vestibule at the side door, and I will be there at the right time. Uncle doesn't want the girls to know."

"All right, Miss Mary, mum's the word. Your uncle is one of these men who don't let their left hand know what the right's doing. No blow or show about him!"

At this moment, the other girls, who had evidently been plotting something, ran towards them.

"Dan, before you go will you *please* do us a favor?" asked Margaret.

"Certainly I will. What is it?"

"Bertha and the two other little tots are upstairs, and we want you to talk to them through the speaking tube and make believe you're Santa Claus. Will you, please?"

"I will, indeed," said Dan. "Anything to add to the fun."

"I'll call Sister first," said Margaret, "and ask her to put Bertha on a chair so she can hear you. I'm dying to know what she will say. You must tell her to talk loud, Dan, so we can all hear."

In the dormitory the three little ones were busy around a small table writing letters to Santa Claus, when the electric bell called Sister to the tube.

"Someone wants to speak to Bertha," she announced. "Come, stand on this chair so you can reach the tube."

Bertha promptly climbed on the chair.

"Who is 'oo?" she inquired; then, pale with excitement, she turned to Sister, exclaiming, "O Sissoo! it's Sandy Tlaus and he wants to talk to *me!!*"

"Well, talk to him, dear. Don't be afraid."

"Ess, Mister Sandy Tlaus," quavered Bertha, "zis am me."

"What are you doing up there?" inquired the deep voice.

"I was witing 'oo a yetter, and Helen and Josy-feem am witing one too, and Josy-feem did say zat 'oo tan't wead my witing."

"You needn't be afraid of that, my dear. I can read it upside down."

At this, the merriment at Dan's end of the line bubbled over.

"Oh, am zose 'oor weindeer laughing? Zey laughs most like yitty dirls, don't zey?" said Bertha, who waxed more sociable as her fear of her mysterious friend abated. "I wis' I tould see zem."

"Well, you'll see them this evening if you keep your eyes open. But what about those letters? It seems to me you are rather late with them. Besides, I received some from you last week."

"But we finked of some more fings zat we want," piped the child. Then aside, to her companions, "Hurry up, twick! He did say we is most too late!" at which dire threat, Helen and Josephine fell to writing with renewed energy.

"Perhaps you'd better *tell* me what you want?" continued the deep voice.

"All I want am a yitty boat so I tan go to Hebben wif muzzer."

"God bless the poor baby," muttered Dan, "she's asking for her own casket."

Bertha caught the sound of the last word.

"No, no, Mister Sandy Tlaus, not a *basket,* but a yitty white boat wif ropes so it will go down in ze dark. I isn't afwaid, 'tause muzzer will hold me," insisted the child.

Dan drew the back of his hand across his eyes, and there was a long silence.

"But don't you want a dolly or some candy?" he at length asked.

"Maywy lets me play wif her dollies; but oh, Mister Sandy Tlaus! *p'ease* bwing Maywy sumpin awful nice, ze most beauty fing 'oo tan. And her uncle and her auntie and all ze Sissoos and all ze dirls and Danny and Patwick."

"But I want to ask you about those girls. Are they good children?"

"Some of 'em am *bery* dood. I *twies* to be dood, but sometimes I fordets and does what auntie telled me not to."

"Is Helen good?"

"Ess," said the child, thoughtfully, "she am *pitty* dood."

"And Josephine?"

"Well," here there was a long pause, "she isn't nennyfing extwa. She pitty near dot 'panked zis morning. But," Bertha hastened to add, "she is going to be dood, always and always now."

The children gathered about Dan were almost in convulsions at the child's answers.

"Ask her about *me.*" "And *me.*" "And *me,*" but Margaret, looking at the clock, reminded them that it was almost eleven, and time to prepare to go to the Chapel.

"Where 'oo is, Mister Sandy Tlaus?" was the next inquiry. "Is 'oo up ze chimney?"

"Not just at present, my dear. Good-by now, and be good," cautioned Dan, hastening away to make up for lost time.

Immediately after dinner, Sister Austin announced that the Sister in charge of the wardrobe was waiting to give the children their white dresses. When Mary's turn came, the child saw that Sister was taking from the shelf the box containing the dress which her mother had sent her from Italy.

"Not that one, Sister, please," she whispered. "One of the others that were made when I went to Wilhelmina's."

Sister looked somewhat surprised, for the other girls were clamoring for the prettiest gowns they possessed.

Going closer to her, Mary added, "I'm saving that for my First Communion, Sister."

"To be sure, dear. I might have known. Now, let me see. Here is one with a blue sash, or would you prefer all white?"

"The blue one, please, Sister. You know, mother consecrated me to our Blessed Lady, so I wore blue and white until I was seven, and she made the promise again for seven more years."

"That was beautiful, dear, and I won't forget to pray for the loved mother tomorrow."

"Thank you, Sister," was the response in an unsteady voice, and on the way to her own little room, Mary could not refrain from thinking how different everything was from what she and Uncle had planned. Having finished her preparations for the morrow, she went to the sacristy to tell Sister Pierre of her unexpected errand.

"I thought Uncle would send the box straight to Mrs. Rooney's," she explained.

"Oh, but this is a much better way," said Sister, cheerily. "It will please her more to have you take it yourself. Of course, I shall miss your help, for the other girls haven't your knack of arranging flowers; but I am so glad you are going to give those poor people some pleasure. Let me see if I haven't a picture or a medal for poor Tommie."

The results of Mary's errand of charity will be seen later.

Half-past three found her among the noisy group that stood in the front hall waiting for the coming of Patrick with the sleigh. A sprig of holly, fastened to the cap or muff of each, gave a Christmasy air to the little party.

"I haven't been out today, but it looks cold. Are you all sure you have plenty of wraps?" inquired Sister Austin, going from one to another, fastening a collar here and a button there.

"Does 'oo fink I is all wight, Sissoo?" asked Bertha, presenting herself for inspection.

"As far as I can see, there is absolutely nothing to be desired in your case. With the exception of your nose and cheeks, Jack Frost will have a hard time to find a place to nip," laughed Sister; for the child, attired in cloak, pointed cap, mittens, leggings, and muff, all of white fur, looked for all the world like a little Eskimo.

"I hear sleigh-bells. He's coming," cried Isabel, flinging open the door and running out on the porch, closely followed by the others.

With a great flourish and a loud blast of his horn, Patrick drew up at the steps. The big, old-fashioned,

double-seated sleigh, which had been in the Carlton family for years, and had carried many a merry party about the avenues and parks of old New York, had been presented by the Doctor to Maryvale some years previous.

"My! don't Buck and Brownie look gay?" cried Florence.

"I wonder if they know they are all dressed up," remarked little Helen.

"They do that," replied Patrick. "If you could have seen them looking out of the corner of their eyes while I pinned those rosettes in front of their ears, and fastened the bits of holly to the harness, you'd say they were as proud as peacocks. In you go, my little polar bear," he continued, lifting Bertha to put her into the sleigh.

"O Patwick, *p'ease* let me sit by side of 'oo and help to make ze hossies wun."

"All right."

"May I sit in front, too, Patrick? Then there'll be more room for the others back here," said Mary.

"To be sure you can," replied the good-natured driver, slipping a small tin horn into Bertha's hand. "Blow that, now, whenever you get a chance."

"I thought Bertha was mad at him since the time she saw him killing the chickens," whispered Catherine to Isabel.

"Oh, they made up long ago, when he gave her one of the little kittens. Wonder what she'd say if she heard about the turkeys?"

"Sh! she'll never know the difference, so don't enlighten her," cautioned Margaret.

"For goodness' sake, girls! *don't* put your feet into the Christmas baskets," cried Isabel in alarm.

"I put the baskets as far under the seats as I possibly could," said Patrick, turning around, "but, asking your pardon, there's lots of people in the world that's always putting their foot into something, so I'd advise you to

be careful back there. Now Bertha, let's hear the sound of that," and with a loud blast of his own horn, he shook the reins and the horses started briskly down the drive. At the same time, the children, turning to wave to Sister, who stood in the doorway, lifted their voices in one of their pretty Christmas carols, Bertha supplying all necessary accompaniment by vigorous toots of her new toy. Soon they had left the Convent gates behind them and were speeding along the main road.

"O girls!" cried Isabel, "I have a most beautiful scheme for the holidays."

"Out with it, then," said Margaret. "I've been trying for a week to think of some way to amuse ourselves so there won't be anyone moping around in corners with a tear in her eye, like some folks did last year," glancing at Josephine. "There is a good reason for every one of us having to stay here during these holidays, and I don't see why we shouldn't get all the fun out of them we possibly can."

"Now Josephine, don't begin," exclaimed Catherine, as that young lady rose to her feet and began to search for her handkerchief to wipe away an imaginary tear.

"I don't care, I'm lonesome right now," insisted Josephine.

"You don't look much like it, so there's no use trying to squeeze out any tears over it. Besides, they'll freeze on your face and make icicles, so you'd better sit down and hear Isabel's plan."

"Well, I thought if each of us older girls took turns at giving a function of some kind——"

"But what *is* zat?" inquired Maria Valdez in a puzzled tone. "I know not if I haf one what you call a *function* to gif you."

"O Maria, Isabel just means for each of us to give some kind of a little party, or entertainment, or feast."

Maria nodded, saying, "Oh yez, I can gif zat."

"You see, we can have one every afternoon," con-

tinued Isabel, "and each one of us will have to send out invitations, and plan games or something to entertain her guests, and give some kind of a prize—any little thing will do—a pretty ribbon, or something she gets off the tree; and she must serve refreshments—we'll all have enough candy and goodies to do that——"

"But why can't we *little* girls be in it?" insisted Helen.

"Why, of course you'll be in it, but I didn't know whether you could get up a function or not. You'll be invited to all of ours, you know."

"Huh!" said Josephine, tossing her head, "I guess Helen and I are the only ones who have dishes to serve 'freshments on. You'll all have to use box covers for plates, and pieces of stiff paper for spoons. Yes, I guess we can have a funkshow as well as any of you and we won't invite you, so there."

"But they *are* going to invite us, Josephine, and I'm going to invite them to mine, and I'll lend them my dishes if they want them, too," declared Helen, the peaceful.

"But—but——" gasped Josephine, altogether taken aback at this desertion on the part of her comrade.

"Good for you, Helen! I'll help you write your invitations. And maybe we will be glad to borrow your dishes. Of course, Mary has her set, and Wilhelmina said I could use her tea-things, but yours may be needed, too."

Bertha, who by this time had wriggled about on the seat until she commanded a view of the group behind her, now frowned down in righteous indignation on the redoubtable Josephine.

"Josy-feem," she began in warning tones, "Josy-feem, I told Sandy Tlaus zat 'oo was going to be a dood dirl always, and always, and always; and now 'oo is as bad as nennyfing. If 'oo don't det dood yight twick, 'oo will find a bundle of 'witches in 'oor 'tocking."

At which dismal prophecy, Josephine's temper showed signs of improvement.

"But Isabel," said Margaret, when the girls, who had vainly tried to conceal their amusement, recovered their composure, "it seems to me it will be a good deal for one to get a party ready all alone."

"I thought of that, and we can manage it this way. We shall draw numbers, and whoever is number one will have to be ready the second day after Christmas—Friday afternoon. Each of us can ask one girl to help her prepare things. Remember, we must all dress up just like for a real function, and if the hostess asks us to play or sing, we must be polite and do it. We'll have to send our regrets or acceptance, too."

"But there won't be any regrets," laughed Margaret. "We'll all come, you may be sure."

"I'm afraid I'll have to send my regrets to some of you," spoke Mary from her lofty seat. "You know I always spend part of the holidays with Uncle in the city. I may go back with him tomorrow evening and stay over Sunday. He likes me to visit the girls I know in town, and I always have a little party and invite them. I didn't expect to have one this year, but Uncle thinks we ought to do what we know mother would like best, so I guess I am to have it." Mary sighed, and there was an uncomfortable silence. Then she continued, "Every year, Uncle and I have teased Aunt Mary to let all the girls who stay here for the holidays, come to my party; but she won't listen to us at all, and only lets me take one with me,—the one who is in my own class. This year there isn't anybody here in my class, but I know the one I'm going to ask for," she declared, hugging the little figure beside her.

"See here," interrupted Patrick, "what's the matter with me giving one of those junkshops, myself, and inviting the crowd of you. Mine will be an outdoor affair, and you needn't be dressing up in your best togs for it, either."

"O Patrick, do you really mean it?" cried the children.

"Of course I do. So any day you have nothing par-

ticular to do, just let me know and I'll give my junk-shop."

As the sleigh jingled merrily through the streets of the village, everyone paused to watch it pass, and old and young waved to the happy party. Patrick knew just where to stop, and at each poor little cottage he helped the children out and carried the well-filled basket to the door-step, before which the girls grouped themselves to sing their Christmas carols. Hard-worked, care-worn mothers, with a crowd of little ones about them, flung open their doors and showered blessings upon the little singers, and especially on the good Sisters, who had provided for them the one bit of Christmas cheer that they expected to enjoy. The girls did not notice that, at each cottage, Mary lingered a moment to slip into the mother's toilworn hand an envelope containing one of the substantial checks with which Uncle had provided her; nor did they hear the fervent "God bless you, darling," followed by the words "poor, little, motherless lamb," spoken in an undertone. For the poor of the village, who had good reason to know Mother Madeline and the Doctor, were all aware of the sorrow which had so early come into the life of their little niece.

"Only one basket left, Patrick, and that's for Mrs. Rooney," called Margaret.

"Mrs. Rooney?" repeated Patrick. "She's a new one, isn't she? We never went to any Mrs. Rooney's last year."

"Yes, she's the poor woman who lives up the road, beyond the Convent. She moved there last summer, don't you remember?"

"To be sure," said Patrick, turning the horses heads homeward, "but I guess we will have to take the road through the woods and come down around by her place, for these critters think they are going home, and I'd never be able to get them past the gates."

Amidst much laughter and singing, jingling of bells and tooting of horns, they finally drew up at Mrs. Rooney's cottage.

"Sister said we could go in here to see Tommie," announced Isabel.

Mrs. Rooney stood at the open door to greet them and usher them into her little parlor, where Tommie, resplendent in a warm red dressing gown and fur-trimmed slippers, lay back in an old arm-chair before a roaring fire.

"My!" exclaimed the children, glancing about at the unusual signs of comfort, "it looks as if Santa Claus had been here, already."

"Santa Claus, indeed," cried Mrs. Rooney, scornfully. "It's not to any Santa Claus we're beholden for what you see here. 'Tis the blessed Babe of Bethlehem Himself has sent a golden-haired angel and an old man to fetch us these grand things. Just feel of that rug underneath Tommie's feet, and see the fine dress and warm coat and gloves and the umbrella and overshoes for the wet weather, that I'm after getting; and the books and puzzles on the table at Tommie's elbow, and there's to be a fire like this while the cold weather lasts. But loosen your coats, children, and take off your warm gloves. You'll not feel the good of them when you go out again." Mrs. Rooney bustled into the kitchen, returning with a big plate of odd-looking little cakes. "Tommie wants you all to have some of these Christmas cakes. It's the kind we make in the old country, and it wouldn't seem quite like Christmas with them left out."

Her story of the angel and the old man had had a subduing effect on the noisy group of children, who spent some time examining the various gifts. Their curiosity was mingled with reverent awe, as if they half expected to discover signs of the supernatural about them.

"But who could the old man have been, Mrs. Rooney?" inquired Margaret, when the striking of the clock warned them it was time to take their departure.

"Did he look like anyone you know?" asked Catherine.

"Why girls!" interrupted little Florence. "You are very stupid, it seems to me. Who could it have been except Saint Joseph!"

Mrs. Rooney and Mary exchanged smiles.

"You mustn't tell," insisted the latter in a whisper, while the children were buttoning their coats and pulling on their gloves. "Mr. Daniel will leave the tree at the back door, just after dark. You found the box of ornaments and things, didn't you?"

"Yes, alanna," replied the grateful woman, "and a hard time I had of it to keep him from seeing them." Then aloud to the children, "Sure, I came near forgetting the best of all, children, for the angel not only brought all these beautiful things, but announced to us *good tidings of great joy!*"

"What were they, Mrs. Rooney, oh! what were they?"

"That a wonderful doctor is coming to see my boy and try to cure him," declared the poor mother, wiping her eyes with the end of her well-starched apron.

"And we will all pray ever so hard that he may," cried the children.

Lights were twinkling in many of the windows when the sleigh swung in between the big gates and sped up the drive. Sister Austin, hearing the fresh young voices, hurried to the door to meet the little girls.

"Just in time to hang up the stockings before supper," she announced, as they trooped up the steps and into the hall.

"O Sister, we've had a perfectly splendid afternoon!" and all began at once to relate the various incidents which had taken place. Sister listened with becoming astonishment to the story of the visit of Saint Joseph and the angel to Mrs. Rooney's cottage. Then she led the way to the recreation room where, save for the feeble glow of the dying embers in the big fire-place, all was in darkness. The older girls could just discern the dim outlines of the great tree at the farther end of the room, but the three little ones suspected nothing. Just as the last stocking was hung, the bell sounded for supper. The summons was obeyed with alacrity, for Mrs. Rooney's

little cakes had not diminished the hearty appetites aroused by the ride in the frosty air.

When the meal was ended, Margaret assured Sister Austin that there was no need of sending anyone to them while she went to her supper, and the children were loud in promises of good behavior during her absence.

"Sister Damien will be glad of a little extra time this evening, I am sure," replied Sister Austin. "It has been such a busy day for her. Suppose you all go up to the library to watch for Santa Claus. He should soon be here."

The windows of the library commanded a fine view of the long drive-way.

"Let's not turn on the lights," said Isabel. "We can see what is going on outdoors much better if it is dark in here."

The three little ones climbed up on the broad window-sills and the larger girls stood close behind them.

"Why, where's the moon?" inquired Josephine. "I thought Sandy Claus came from the moon."

"Well, I guess if he waited for the moon tonight, he'd never be able to do all the work he has to do. He must have come down to the earth last night, for it's Christmas already on the opposite side of the world, and the little Japs and Chinese children are having their presents right now."

"Oh," cried Bertha, clasping her hands, "I wis' I was a Yap or else a yitty Shynee!"

"Well, I don't," said Florence. "I want something better than rice for my dinner tomorrow. I want turkey and cramb'ry sauce and plum pudding."

By degrees, the gay chatter gave place to occasional whispers and soon an expectant hush settled on the groups at the windows. Even the "non-believers" allowed themselves to succumb to the spirit of the hour. Suddenly, Helen pressed her ear to the window pane and held up a warning finger. A thrill ran though each

little frame when the faint, long-drawn blast of a horn was heard coming from the road beyond the gates. Then silence for a minute, followed by another blast, louder this time and accompanied by the distant jingling of sleigh-bells.

"He's tummin'! he's tummin'!" exclaimed Bertha in a whisper, hoarse with excitement; scrambling to her feet on the sill, she pressed her chubby face close to the glass. All eyes were strained in the direction of the gates.

"There!" gasped Josephine, and Florence's eyes grew big as a dark object appeared, far down the drive.

Soon she could discern the outlines of a large sleigh drawn by two dashing reindeer. Then from a window above them, a bright light streamed out upon the drive, giving the children ample opportunity to see the sleigh and its mysterious occupants. On the front seat sat the driver, muffled to his nose in furs. The back part of the sleigh was filled with evergreen trees and big white packs, and in their midst was a roly-poly, little old man with a rosy face and a long white beard.

The sleigh swung around the curve and came to a stop in the shadow of a great pine, almost opposite the library windows. The old man sprang out, and shouldering a tree and an immense pack, staggered across the drive and disappeared around the corner of the house.

"Where's he going?" demanded Josephine, breathlessly.

"Why, he has to get down the big chimney into the recreation room," said one of the larger girls.

"But he'll be deaded!" wailed Bertha. "Ze fire will burn him up!"

"Sh! don't let him hear you, Bertha. That fire has gone out by this time. Don't you remember how low it was before supper? Besides, he wears big boots so he can go anywhere."

The reindeer stood pawing the snow and tossing their great horns until the driver shook the reins, when they began to move slowly around the curve. Soon the cor-

ner of the house hid the sleigh from view. At that moment Sister Austin entered the room and turned on the lights. The children rushed towards her, except Margaret and Mary, who remained ostensibly to lower the shades, but in reality to exchange opinions on the events which had just occurred.

"Who'd ever think old Buck and Brownie would make such fine reindeer," whispered Mary.

"But how do they carry those big heavy horns on their heads, and where do the horns come from?"

"One pair belongs to Father Hartley and the other is from the museum upstairs. They're not a bit heavy, but I don't see how Mr. Daniel gets them to stay on so well. Doesn't he make a cute little Santa Claus?"

"He makes a much better Saint Joseph, I think," declared Margaret, her eyes twinkling.

"O Margaret!" exclaimed Mary in dismay. "Who ever told you? Uncle doesn't want anyone to know."

"Nobody told me. I just guessed it was so, and now I'm sure of it. That's not fair, is it?" she laughed, putting her arm around the younger child. "But I won't breathe a word, truly I won't."

"No, please don't. That's the only time I ever see Uncle annoyed, when Tom or someone tells something good about him."

"Hm!" said the older girl. "Some men would be glad if someone got out an 'extra' about their good deeds."

A sign from Sister called them to join the circle under the light, and for a time all was quiet, while she read for them Saint Luke's beautiful account of the first Christmas night. Night prayers followed in the Chapel, which, save for the sanctuary lamp and a dim light back near the door, was in darkness. It was only when their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, that the children were able to make out the crib with its dark background of pines.

Sister Austin had no intention of calling the three youngest children for the Midnight Mass; but as she passed through the nursery on her way to the adjoining dormitory, three little heads popped up from their pillows, and three excited voices whispered, "Is it time?" There was nothing for her to do but to get them ready. Bertha was the last dressed, and Mary, who had waited to help Sister, took the little one with her to the Chapel. As they passed the big clock in the hall, she noticed that it was a quarter to twelve, and entering the Chapel, she looked eagerly about for her uncle. He always waited for her just inside the door, then accompanied her to a pew near the front. But tonight she searched in vain among the bowed forms in the pews for the familiar figure. Had he missed the ten-thirty train? If so, she knew there was no possibility of his coming until morning. But perhaps he had stopped at Father Hartley's cottage and would come up to the Convent with him. Buoyed up by this hope, she led Bertha to one of the front pews, taking care to keep near the end herself in order to save a place for Uncle.

"Oh, oh! Maywy, look!" whispered Bertha, excitedly. "See Jesus and all ze yitty yambs!"

"Sh!" said Mary. "If you're a real good girl and don't talk, I'll take you over to the Crib right after Mass. Sit still and listen to the pretty music Sister is playing."

The moments sped and poor Mary's heart sank lower and lower as she listened in vain for the step she longed to hear.

"Little Lord Jesus," she prayed, "it was poor and cold at Bethlehem, but You had Your dear Mother."

Then she saw that the sacristy was lighted and knew that the Chaplain had arrived. The last thread of hope snapped, and a big lump gathered in her throat. Suddenly the solemn stillness of the night was broken by the first toll of the great bell ringing the hour. The *Adeste* seemed to melt into the *Kyrie,* the sacristy door opened, and Father Hartley took his place at the foot of the altar.

Mary bowed her head on her hands, but immediately raised it in response to a touch on her arm. As if by magic the big lump disappeared before she could even move to make room for the Doctor, and when he had taken his place at her side, she again bent her head and pressed her lips to the strong hand which rested near her own on the front of the pew. His fingers closed over her frail little ones in an affectionate squeeze, for his quick eye had detected the unshed tears. He also reached around behind her to pat the shoulder of her little neighbor, who was vainly striving to repress her joy at his arrival.

At the moment of Communion, when Uncle had left the pew to go to the railing, Mary whispered to Bertha, "Tell little Jesus how you wish He would come to your heart."

But Bertha shook her head. "No, no, I want Him in my arms so I tan hold Him tight and w'ap my soft w'ite toat awound Him to teep Him warm."

"Well, tell Him so," said Mary, as she bowed her head to make her own Spiritual Communion. Bertha imitated her as closely as possible.

When Mass was ended, Mary, with a whispered explanation to her uncle, led Bertha to the Crib and carefully told the child the meaning of all she saw there. Bertha listened intently, but suddenly interrupted her with, "Ask her to let me hold Him a yitty while, *p'ease* do, Maywy."

"But Bertha," said Mary, somewhat startled at the effect her words had produced, "that is only a statue of little Jesus,—not really Himself. Come, feel this lamb. It isn't alive, you know. It can't move, or anything like that. These statues and things are just to remind us of how it all was when Jesus was born."

"Oh!" said Bertha, plainly disappointed.

Mary not knowing what the child might ask next, hurried her back to Uncle. Together, the three left the Chapel and found Isabel waiting for them in the hall.

"Sister told me to take Bertha down so you can go with your uncle," she explained.

A few moments later when the Doctor was drinking the coffee prepared for him in the reception-room, he remarked, "So you thought your old uncle had forgotten his little girl, did you?"

"You know I could never think that, Uncle, but I *had* given up all hope of seeing you tonight. Was the train late, or did you get lost in the snow-drifts on the way from the station?"

"Neither," replied the Doctor. "I was obliged to consult Aunt Mary about a wonderful present I have for you. By the way, you will not find in your stocking the usual number of odds and ends that I suppose little girls have a right to expect for Christmas. I had made out quite a respectable list of things which I fully intended to purchase this morning, or rather yesterday morning, but my time was so occupied with this wonderful gift, that I could think of nothing else. I sent a box containing a few books and games, last week, but I fear you will pay little attention to them when you see this other thing."

"Why, whatever can it be? Do give me just a teeny weeny hint, Uncle."

"Not a word," laughed the Doctor. "And there's another point. Don't come to me in the morning until I send for you. It will take me fifteen or twenty minutes to get it in place and in working order."

"Hm! that sounds like a machine of some kind," observed Mary, thoughtfully.

"It is the most wonderful piece of machinery I have ever seen, and one that your aunt and I can enjoy as well as you.

"Oh, that's lovely! May I bring Bertha with me to see it?"

"You may, if she is with you at the time. But come promptly when you get my message, or you will be apt to lose some of the best effects."

"And you say Aunt Mary knows what it is?"

"Yes, but you need not expect any light from that quarter. She has promised to keep out of your way until I send for you. Yes, Father," as the Chaplain appeared in the doorway, "I am ready, and I assure you that you have come just in time. These women folk can't keep a secret themselves, and they seem determined that no one else shall."

Mary ran to greet Father Hartley and knelt for his blessing.

"May the blessed Babe of Bethlehem keep you one of His little lambs, forever," said the Chaplain, kindly.

"And what can you say to an old sinner like me, Father?" asked Uncle Frank, taking his place beside Mary.

"God bless you, my son, God bless you," murmured Father Hartley, raising his hand in benediction.

As the two men stood in the hall, buttoning their overcoats, Mary archly remarked, "Hm! I have a secret, too, and I'm not going to tell what it is, either. You'll find it under your plate at breakfast."

"Not another pair of slippers!" exclaimed the Doctor, looking dismayed.

"O Uncle, Uncle! that's *too* funny. Just imagine a pair of slippers *your* size under a breakfast plate," cried the little girl going off into peals of laughter in which the others were forced to join. "But Father doesn't know our joke about the slippers," she continued. "When I came here to school, Father, I learned to crochet slippers, and as I had an idea that men wore out things very fast, I gave Uncle—let me see, how many?" counting on her fingers. "There were your birthday, Christmas, and Easter, the first year; and two pairs the next, —yes, I gave him five pairs altogether. There were black ones with pink bows, and black ones with red bows, and red ones with black bows, and another red pair—you see, Father, I didn't really want to make two pairs the

same color, but Sister said I couldn't be so conscravagant as to buy more worsted when I already had enough."

"Here comes Sister Austin to see why I am keeping you so long. Run down to your lunch, and then get all the sleep you can before daylight."

"But Uncle, you are not going without giving me just a little bit of a hint as to what that is?" urged Mary. "Why, I won't sleep a wink, I know."

"Not a hint will I give you, and if you are sleepy and tired all day, you will not be able to enjoy my gift half so well. Besides, if you were to try from now until doomsday, you would never guess my secret."

"Try me, Uncle! Give me three guesses and see if I can't."

"No, no, no!" declared Uncle, laughing as he opened the door for Father Hartley.

But Mary clung to his arm and made a last attempt.

"I'll tell *my* secret if you'll tell yours," she urged, coaxingly.

"Do you hear that, Father? A clear case of bribery! Sister, keep the culprit in strict custody until I send for her," and freeing himself from Mary's grasp, he hurried down the steps to overtake the Chaplain.

"Dear, dear Uncle," said Mary with a little sigh, as she passed through the hall by Sister's side. "He is always planning to make me happy. I wish I could do something worth while for him."

"But you do many things, Mary, that please him very much. Only yesterday, Mother Madeline remarked what a little comfort you are to both of them."

"Oh, did she say that? I'm so glad she feels that way, because no matter what they do for me, I can't help being lonely sometimes. Uncle and I had planned everything so differently, and it has all been *such* a disappointment. I can't help wanting my mother, Sister, I just can't!"

"Of course you can't, dear; neither do your aunt and

uncle expect you to help that. All they desire is that you will not grieve so much for her as to make yourself positively unhappy. Days like this are apt to be very trying to those who have lost their dear ones, but I know you will strive to be bright and cheerful, and in that way show those who love you so much that you appreciate all their efforts to make you happy. Do you ever try to imagine what Heaven is, especially on a great day like this? Think how many joyful surprises are in store for your loved ones on this, their first Christmas there. I sometimes wonder if, on this day, our Lord does not again take the form of the little Infant in the arms of our Blessed Mother; and I picture to myself those good, simple shepherds, surely saints now, and the three Wise Men, and all the other saints gathering about Him for a special Christmas blessing; and around and over all, myriads of bright angels filling Heaven with their *Gloria in Excelsis*. Yes, that is the way I like to imagine Heaven on Christmas Day, and it seems to me, thoughts like these would soon transform sad memories into a feeling of real happiness. Suppose you try it today."

"You have made it all better already, Sister. What you say reminds me of Bertha, when I took her to the Crib after Mass. Somehow she got an idea that the statues and sheep were living, and she was so disappointed when she couldn't hold the little Infant and wrap Him in her new coat to keep Him warm. O Sister, there is something that I've been intending to ask you about all day."

"The day is still very young, my dear."

"I'm all twisted," laughed Mary. "You see I'm not used to being up so late—or so early—which shall I say? But this is what I want to ask. Have you opened the boxes that came for the girls?"

"Yes, Mary, I always do so as soon as they arrive and remove from them any of the perishable things that should be kept in a cool place."

"Yes, Sister, but did you find any boxes that haven't anything real Christmasy in them? any with just use-

ful things? Of course," she hastened to add, "the useful things are very nice, but it seems to me every little girl ought to get something besides them for Christmas."

"I agree with you, and there is one box which is not the least bit Christmasy, as you say. It is for Florence. You know she is dependent on her grandmother, a very good, sensible old lady, but one who thinks a child should have done with toys as soon as she is old enough to go to school. She has sent a fine warm outfit of knitted goods—cap, jacket, leggings, mittens, and so on—her own work and beautifully made, it is true, but all of a dull slate color without so much as a red scallop or a brass button to relieve the monotony."

"I know the very thing, then. Do, please, wait here just a minute, Sister." Mary ran swiftly away, returning immediately with a flat square box. "There are colors enough in this to please anyone. Liza and Tom gave them to me my last birthday," she explained, as Sister removed the cover, displaying a number of handsome hair-ribbons.

"My dear child, I cannot think of taking all these from you. One or two will be quite sufficient."

"But Sister, Florence may as well have them, because I never intend to use them myself. That's not a very generous reason for giving them away, is it?" she said, laughing. "But really, you know I never wear anything but blue and white, and these are pink, green, and every color of the rainbow. There were two blue ones in the box, and I always make a point of wearing one of them when I go to the city, so as not to hurt the feelings of Liza and Tom. Please take them, Sister, and let us go down to see if there isn't something that will do for Florence in the box Uncle sent."

"We must be quick, or the others will think we are up to some mischief," said Sister, unlocking the door of the recreation room and turning on the light.

"Oh, isn't the tree beautiful, Sister! Here is my box. Hm! Uncle said a *few* books and games, and there are

enough here for a good size orphan asylum. I hope these won't be too hard for Florence; but if they are, some of us can read them aloud to her. And here are some games she will like, I know."

"Now, Mary, one book and one game will be all I shall take."

"O Sister, that looks so skimpy. Take two of each and this funny toy. It winds up somehow. Uncle always puts in something ridiculous. Sister, you will have to watch Florence's letters to her grandmother so she won't mention these things," cautioned the little girl, replacing the cover on her box and rising to her feet. "Why! there's another big wooden box for me. I wonder who sent that," she exclaimed, walking around it to look for the sender's name.

"That's not fair," laughed Sister, turning off the light. "You came here to *play* Santa Claus, not to see what he brought you. Come, give me your hand so you won't fall over anything in the dark."

Carefully locking the door again, the two conspirators hurried to the lunch room to join the girls there. A funny sight greeted them. Bertha, her dark eyes flashing defiance and indignation, was seated facing the door. Her chubby arms, like a rampart, encircled Mary's plate, which was piled high with all kinds of good things. The moment she spied Mary she cried excitedly, "Tum twick! oh, tum twick! I is having a most drefful time saving 'oo nennyfing to eat. Zose dirls did say zey is going to eat it all up," at which accusation the girls protested loudly that they were only joking.

"'Oo wasn't joking—'oo meaned it!" insisted the child.

"Why Bertha!" exclaimed Mary, "it was ever so good of you to remember me, but I couldn't eat all that in a week. I'm afraid you didn't leave anything for the other girls."

"Ess, zey ate ev'yfing all up, and *zen*," in scornful tones, "*zen* zey did say zey would eat ze chups and saucers."

"But you haven't taken a bite yourself," declared Mary, spying the untasted sandwich on the little one's plate. "Here, you must have some of my figs and grapes and candy and these cute little cakes; and then we had better pass the rest around, hadn't we?"

"Oh, it am all wight now," said Bertha grandly, casting a triumphant look upon her vanquished neighbors. "I only wanted 'oo to have some of ev'yfing."

The substantial lunch being finished, the children were hurried back to bed.

It was broad daylight when the third Mass was over, and the girls hastened to the recreation room to make the most of the time before breakfast. After the excitement of opening the Christmas boxes had somewhat subsided, Mary looked about for Bertha, but the child was not in the room.

"Sister took her away just as we left the Chapel," explained Helen. "I guess she wanted to fix Bertha's hair. There wasn't time to do it right before Mass."

Mary, earnestly hoping that the child would join them before she was summoned to the parlor, turned to the box which, some hours before, had so aroused her curiosity.

"It's from Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta! I might have guessed. I do hope our things will get *there* in time. Here's a card. 'To Uncle Frank and Mary from all of us.' I won't look at a thing until he's here to help," she resolved, and, replacing the cover, turned to survey the scene about her. The delight of little Florence over the books and games more than repaid Mary for the sacrifice she had made. Then one of the Sisters appeared in the doorway with the expected message.

"Which parlor, Sister?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"The west one, Mary."

"Do you know what it is, Sister? Have you seen it?"

"I have, and I haven't," replied Sister, mysteriously. "That is, I have seen part of it,—enough to know that you will never grow too old to enjoy it."

"My, my! whatever can it be? Please excuse me, Sister, but I really must run the rest of the way. I just can't walk like this," and the child sped down the hall, only pausing a moment to knock at the closed door of the west parlor. There was no response. Opening the door, she was surprised to find no one in the room. In the middle of the floor, however, stood a large hamper, about the size and shape of a steamer trunk.

"Sister must have made a mistake," thought Mary. "There's no one here. Uncle plainly said the thing was a machine and that he wanted to have it in working order. I'll try the east parlor." She crossed the hall to the big room opposite. No one there, either, and no sign of a machine of any kind. "I'll have to ask Sister again," she said, returning to the hall. But Sister was nowhere to be seen. Indeed, everything was so unusually quiet that Mary began to suspect a joke. "Guess I'll take a look at that basket, anyway. Uncle is up to some trick, I know, and he's hiding somewhere so he can see all I do. He never before made such a fuss even when he gave me something really beautiful, so it makes me think all the more that this is a joke. Well, I'll let him have all the fun he wants," she declared, returning to the west parlor to take a closer look at the hamper. "No name on it," she observed, unconsciously speaking aloud. "Mercy on us! it's something *alive!*" retreating a few steps, still keeping her eyes fixed on the basket. "It moved, I know it did. It's something white," she continued, walking slowly around the mystery at a safe distance from it. "Maybe it's a dog. But a dog isn't a machine—still, I s'pose anything alive is a most wonderful machine. Oh, I just must see what it is!" falling on her knees beside the hamper and beginning to untie the rope with which the cover was fastened down. "Uncle knows I don't like knots," she murmured, as she paused to rest and examine her aching fingers. "If that animal has to be tied down like this, I had better be ready to run when the cover flies off." She looked about her to see in which direction lay her surest means of escape. "But Uncle would't give me anything that would hurt

me," she went on, still speaking aloud. "I wonder if they'll let me keep a dog here. Mr. Daniel would take care of it for me. Well, whatever it is, I think I'll untie that last knot standing up." She rose to her feet and again looked around her. "I wonder where Uncle is hiding. He'll laugh and tease me for being such a coward; but really, that animal is getting terribly frisky."

As she again bent over the hamper, she noticed a card lying close beside it on the floor, and picking it up she read, "Wishing my dear sister every Christmas joy."

"*Wishing my dear sister—wishing my dear*—why, I have no sisters or brothers to send me a Christmas present. *Wishing my dear sister*——" she rubbed her eyes and read the words over and over again. What did it all mean. "Can it be—oh! can it be that Uncle has found one of the darling babies and this is her present to me?" she thought. "But I don't want presents; I want *her!*" She sprang to her feet and looked about her. "Uncle! Aunt Mary! oh, where are you! Can it be, oh! can it be?" she cried, once more reading the words pencilled on the card. There was no answer to her appeal, and she started for the door. Suddenly she paused, for a thought had flashed through her mind. "Dear, dear," she murmured, sadly, "what a silly goosie I am. Poor, dear Uncle just made a mistake and wrote *sister* instead of *niece*. I'm glad he didn't hear me." Turning the card over and over, she returned to the basket; but the buoyancy was gone from her step, and loneliness tugged at her poor little heart. "I do wish Uncle would come help me open it," she said, wistfully. "It's so much nicer not to be the only one in a s'prise. But what's the matter with me, anyway? This isn't my present at all. It's Aunt Mary's, of course. That's what Uncle means by *my dear sister*. How glad I am I didn't open it? But *where* is my machinery? Oh, now I know! Sister meant the little parlor away down at the west end of the hall. Uncle will wonder what is keeping me all this time." She started from the room, but a sound from the hamper made her wheel about and regard it

with suspicion. "That sounded like——" again she looked at the card, then "Oh!" she cried, running back and falling on her knees before the basket, "Oh!" and she tugged and strained frantically at the last knot. A mighty jerk, the cover flew back, something white sprang up, a pair of soft little arms was thrown about her neck, and "Happy Twismas! Happy Twismas! I'se 'oor yitty sissoo!" rang in her ears.

"I know! I know! O Berta! Berta! my own, dear, darling Berta!" she cried, over and over and over again, as, bewildered and overcome with emotion, she clung passionately to the small bundle of animation before her.

"Ess! ess! *Zat's* my name! *Berta!* not ugly old *Berfa,* what auntie did always say. But why is 'oo cwying, Maywy? Isn't 'oo dlad 'oo found me?" demanded the child in an aggrieved tone.

"Glad, precious! glad! I'm so happy I don't know what I'm doing!"

"Zat's bery funny. I neber cwy ven I is happy; only ven I falls me down or sumpin," explained Berta, brushing the tears from Mary's face with fingers which did not improve its appearance. "And 'oo finked I was a doggie, and 'oo was goin' away, so I laughed a yitty bit so 'oo would tum back, and zey was hiding, zey was. And now 'oo is my bid sissoo, and I is 'oor yitty sissoo, and 'oor auntie is my auntie, and Uncle Fwank is my weally Uncle Fwank and not a only *make b'lieve,* nenny more——"

"Well, well, well! And who ever said there was anything *make believe* about me, I should like to know?" laughed a big voice behind them.

Mary sprang to her feet only to find herself imprisoned by Uncle's strong arm.

"Now, my little culprit, who says I cannot keep a secret, and what about that fine you owe—halloo! what's the matter here? Surely you two haven't been at it already? Berta, have you been trying to give Mary two black eyes at once?"

. . . . . .

The child, who was delightedly hopping about the two, paused when she heard her name.

"Zat's where I was wiping away ze cwies," she explained, adding apologetically, "and I is afwaid my finners isn't so bery tlean."

"That is evident," laughed her uncle.

"Oh, it was just a beautiful secret, Uncle!—and mother?—and Beth?" she demanded breathlessly, looking eagerly about the room.

The Doctor paused for an instant, wondering how best to frame the words that must crush the newly awakened hope which shone from every feature of the radiantly happy little face upturned to his.

"Little one," he replied tenderly, "will not our joy and gratitude for the restoration of even one of our loved ones lessen in some degree the sorrow we feel at our separation from the others? And can't you and I help each other to rejoice in their joy, which is as far above ours as Heaven is above earth?"

The eager light died suddenly from the dark eyes gazing so trustingly into his; but the child smiled bravely up at him despite the huskily whispered, "Yes, Uncle, we can."

"After a little," he continued in a cheery tone, "I will tell you when and how I learned my secret. But here is Aunt Mary. Her hiding-place was farther away than mine."

"Not so far but what I could see and hear all that went on. Indeed, more than once, I was strongly tempted to come to your assistance, Mary. Uncle is a master hand at tying knots, isn't he, dear?" asked the religious, kissing the child affectionately.

"I should say he is, Aunt Mary. My fingers ache yet. Oh! isn't it just too beautiful for anything, Auntie? I can hardly believe it's true. Do shake me so I can be sure it isn't all a dream."

"I think some breakfast will prove that you are quite

wide awake. Come," she said, taking Berta's hand and leading the way to the breakfast room.

"Auntie, does Sister Austin know?"

"No, dear, I did not have an opportunity of seeing her, and besides, I felt that you, yourself, should be the first to know of it."

"Then please let me take Berta down and show her to Sister and the girls."

"One would think they had never seen her," laughed Mother Madeline.

"But she's different now. Please let me."

"Very well, but hurry back. The breakfast will be cold."

Hand in hand the two ran down the hall. Entering the room where the children were at breakfast, Mary cried, "Sister! girls! see! see the wonderful present I found upstairs!"

Sister was in the act of pouring the coffee, but she promptly placed the coffee-pot on the end of the table and turned to show a becoming interest in Mary's gift. The children jumped up from their places, for Mary's presents were always worth examining. When, however, they beheld both little girls empty-handed, they sat down again and laughed heartily at what they considered a joke at their expense. Not so, Sister Austin. The evidences of unusual excitement and joy in Mary's face and voice left her no room to doubt that the child was in earnest. With a questioning look, she went to meet the two.

"I mean it, Sister!" cried Mary, somewhat disappointed at the effect produced by her first announcement. "She is mine, *mine!* My very own! Oh, don't you understand?"

"God be praised!" exclaimed Sister, devoutly, as the truth began to dawn upon her. "My dear child, do you mean that Bertha is one of your little——"

"Yes, yes, Sister!" insisted Mary, impatient at such slowness of comprehension. "She is *Berta—Berta Sel-*

wyn—my own darling little sister. There never was any Bertha Ashmere at all," and the child threw her arms about the little one at her side, hugging her so vehemently that poor Berta gasped and winked very hard.

Then followed a scene such as the pictures on the wall had never beheld. When the excitement had somewhat subsided, Mary remembered her aunt's injunction. "We must go now," she said, "Uncle is waiting for his breakfast. He will come down after awhile to show us how to play all the games and wind up the toys and everything. Just think," she went on in a tone of self-reproach to Sister, who accompanied them to the door, "just think, Sister, she has been here all this time and I never knew she was mine."

"My dear little girl, even had you known it, you could not have shown her any greater affection and care. I have never seen anyone more devoted to her own sister than you have been to this little one. The Sisters have all remarked it, too."

"I couldn't tell why it was," replied Mary, "but I loved her the minute I saw her, and I have ever since been pretending she *was* my little sister."

"And I was making b'lieve zat Maywy's uncle and auntie was bofe mine, too," laughed Berta.

"So now all the *making believe* has come true, as in the fairy stories, and all you have to do is to live happy ever after," said Sister.

The two children hurried back to the breakfast room.

"I insisted that Uncle should begin without you," said Aunt Mary. "He did not have the substantial lunch you enjoyed after the Midnight Mass. Berta, we should have brought your own chair from the refectory, but perhaps we can manage by putting this big book on one of these," and Mother Madeline lifted the child to the seat thus prepared. Then she busied herself serving the two little girls until the Doctor interfered, sending her to her own breakfast. She had hardly left the room when Mary jumped up from the table.

"Uncle, I *must* send a telegram!"

"Well, well," said her uncle gravely, "is it a matter of life and death, or will you give me time to finish this piece of steak?"

Mary resumed her seat, laughing. "Oh, it will do after breakfast, but Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta must know our good news as soon as possible."

"Would it not be better to *tell* it to them? Telegrams are rather unsatisfactory things, I think," replied Uncle Frank, his eyes twinkling.

"But Uncle," urged Mary, "just think how long it will take for a letter to reach them."

"I said nothing about a letter, did I?" asked the Doctor, innocently. "I was thinking of the long-distance phone. Surely, an occasion of this kind warrants a little bit of extravagance."

"Oh, you dear old Uncle," cried Mary, leaving her place to give him a hug. "You always *do* think of the most beautiful plans. Just imagine some men going to the trouble of getting that big basket to put Berta in! No, they would have sent for me and said, 'My dear niece, this is your little sister, and if you are not good to her, I will——' Then they'd go home and get out an *extreedishun* about the wonderful thing they did. That's what Margaret says some men are like, and her father is a news-paper man, so I s'pose she knows. But *how did* you ever find her, Uncle? You haven't told me a word, yet."

"The mystery to me is how you and Aunt Mary *didn't* find her. You two, who pride yourselves on being able to guess all *my* secrets, have lived with Berta nearly four months without even suspecting the truth."

"I always said she reminded me of someone," pleaded Mary, lamely. "See," she continued, pulling her locket from out the neck of her dress, "isn't she the image of father?"

"Why, Maywy, where *did* 'oo det my yocket?"

"This isn't yours, Berta. Have you a locket like this?"

"I *had* one, but Auntie she did say I'd lose it and she taked it away from me," said the child, sadly.

"Thought you might be identified by means of it," muttered the Doctor.

"Never mind, Berta, you can wear mine until Uncle gets yours for you. Come here and let me put it on you now." She fastened the chain about the child's neck and turned again to her uncle for the desired information.

"Let us first finish our breakfast," he said, "then I shall give you some letters to read. They will tell the story better than I can."

A short time later, when he had settled himself for a smoke in a big rocker, with Berta on his knee, he took from his pocket a long envelope which he handed to Mary, saying, "There are two letters. Better read the shorter one first. It is from your aunt's lawyer and will help you to understand the other."

"Hm! it isn't very good writing for a grown man, I must say," observed Mary, and then in silence she read the following:

Dear Sir:—The enclosed has just been dictated to me by Mrs. Herbert Ashmere, the sister of Robert Selwyn, your late brother-in-law. You will observe that it is unfinished, owing to the fact that the lady, who is seriously ill, was overcome by a sudden weakness, followed by a state of unconsciousness from which she has not yet rallied. The doctors say her condition is critical, and, as she is most anxious to see you before she dies, I urge you, sir, to come with the least possible delay.

Yours truly,

George Greydon.

Mary opened the second paper. It contained no word of address, but proceeded at once with the following statements:

In the Convent of Maryvale, on the outskirts of the town of ————, New York, there is a little child known as Bertha Ashmere. I have allowed it to be thought that she is the niece of my deceased husband, Herbert Ashmere, but such is not the case. The little girl is Berta Selwyn, one of the twin daughters of my favorite brother, Robert Selwyn.

I first met the child, with her mother and little sister, on board the steamer *Helena,* where, under an assumed name, I became sufficiently acquainted with the mother to learn of my brother's death and several other facts.

On account of her resemblance to my brother, I became passionately attached to Berta; but the child seemed to have an instinctive dread of me, and repelled all my advances. However, on that awful night when the *Helena* sank, I succeeded in getting possession of her and afterwards brought her here, where I strove in my own selfish way to make her happy. But she shrank from me and never ceased her piteous appeals to be restored to her mother. The annoyance this caused me, together with my failing health, made me resolve to place her for a time at Maryvale. As I was obliged to make the necessary arrangements by letter, I met none of the Sisters until November, when the Superior with a companion called to see me. I listened eagerly to their accounts of Berta and her little friends, and you may imagine my surprise when, in the course of the conversation, I learned that my darling was being loved and cared for by her own. Nevertheless, I kept my secret, and in response to your sister's inquiries about the child's relatives, I assured her that I was the only one remaining to her.

A few words of sympathy, which your sister addressed to me before leaving, opened my eyes to the fact that my illness was a blessing from a merciful God. As the days went by, I began to realize the enormity of the crime I had committed and the general selfishness and sinfulness of my life. Many a bitter hour did I spend alone with these reflections; but that same Mercy which opened the

eyes of my soul, also inspired me with a firm hope of pardon. You are probably aware, that I never professed any religious belief; but tomorrow I am to be received into the Catholic Church.

The physicians tell me I have not many days to live, but I cannot die in peace until I hear from your own lips that you and yours forgive me the terrible wrong I have done you. I have to tell you, myself——''

Here the confession ended.

''You went, Uncle, you went to see her?'' asked Mary, eagerly.

''Yes, Mary. Those letters reached me yesterday while I was at breakfast, and I took the first train I could get to Albany. But when I arrived at your aunt's home, I found that she had been dead some hours.''

''O Uncle!'' cried the child, in a shocked tone. ''Then she didn't become a Catholic.''

''But she had the desire, dear,'' he answered, gently, ''and though she did not regain consciousness for one instant, the priest gave her conditional baptism.''

''I'm *so* glad,'' said Mary, with a sigh of relief. Then a look of dismay settled on the fair little face, and in a distressed voice she went on, ''You say she didn't regain consciousness, but Uncle, hadn't she ever told Lena, or the priest, or anyone, what it was she was so anxious to tell you? See, here at the end of the letter, she says she wants to tell you something. Oh, she must have meant about mother and Beth, and didn't she ever tell anyone so they could tell you?''

''My dear little girl, all that your aunt had to make known to me is told in that letter. Of that I am positive. She probably wished to say how sorry she was, or something of that kind; but as for giving us any information about mother and Beth—why dear, you may rest assured that, after getting possession of Berta, she took particular care to keep away from mother or anyone else who might recognize her. Mary, the one point which has been a mystery to me is cleared up at last. No one could ever

make me believe that your mother, having once made her escape with the children from the stateroom, could be induced to return to it for money or anything else which she had left there. I knew there must be some grave reason for such an act, and there it is," said the Doctor with a nod at Berta, who, at the beginning of this conversation, had slipped from his knee to watch the snow-birds hopping about beneath the window.

"But where *was* Aunt Bertha that mother couldn't find her?" insisted Mary, piteously.

"You may be sure your aunt had managed to find a place in one of the first boats lowered."

Mary was silent for a moment. Then the memory of Berta's story of the wreck flashed through her mind.

"Uncle, it's all wrong! There's some terrible mistake, somewhere! Berta told me that her mother and sister went down in a little white boat, and that her aunt held her tight and wouldn't let her go with them; and every time Berta talks about it, she cries and says she's naughty and that her aunt will punish her for telling about it. So you see mother *couldn't* have been lost in the ship."

"But, Mary," urged the Doctor gently, "if mother and Beth were lowered in one of the boats, why were they not among the passengers picked up by the rescuing steamers? I was assured by the officers and the sailors that every one who entered a life-boat was finally put aboard one or other of those vessels. No, no, dear, Berta is mistaken. In her terror at being separated from mother, she probably caught sight of someone in a boat who resembled her; or perhaps she dreamed something of the kind and afterwards fancied that it had really happened. Little children have very lively imaginations."

"How *could* Aunt Bertha do such a thing! How *dared* she! Oh! if it weren't for her, mother and Beth wouldn't——"

"Hush, child, hush!" exclaimed the Doctor, surprised at this outburst. Drawing her to him, he gently strove to calm the tumult that was raging in the little heart.

"Let me tell you something, Mary, that will help you to think more kindly of your poor aunt. She herself says that she never practiced any religion. Her mother was an invalid, and from the time Bertha was a little child she was left to the care of governesses, who took great pains that she should become a graceful, accomplished girl, but neglected the one thing necessary. Old Mr. Selwyn idolized his only daughter, and on the death of his wife allowed Bertha, then a handsome girl of sixteen, to go to a fashionable boarding-school of her own choosing. It was in vain that your father remonstrated. The old gentleman could see no fault in the wilful, passionate girl. She loved your father with a jealous love, but paid no heed to his brotherly advice and caused him endless anxiety. Her selfish affection for him changed to hatred when, shortly after she had finished school and had taken her place as mistress of her father's home, Robert became a Catholic, and later, married one. She succeeded, as you know, in completely turning old Mr. Selwyn against his eldest child." The Doctor refrained from adding that it was by accident Robert Selwyn heard of his father's death a month after it had occurred.

"After your grandfather's death, she joined your Uncle Alfred abroad, and I heard no more of her until I received this letter. The lawyer tells me she married an Englishman, a Mr. Ashmere. What has become of your uncle, he does not know. Now, dear, what could one expect from a person brought up as was your poor aunt,—pampered and petted, absolutely unrestrained and uncorrected. Then, too, who are we to sit in judgment on her to whom God has shown such boundless mercy? You may be sure that your father's intercession for her before the throne of God has been largely instrumental in obtaining for her the grace of conversion. We owe much, also, to the prayers of Aunt Mary and the Sisters. Why, just think what it would mean if your aunt had not written that letter. We should never have known that Berta is ours, and the poor child would have been utterly alone in the world. By the way, that little sister of yours is quite an heiress. With the exception of a

large legacy to the Convent here—a token of gratitude for the kindness shown Berta and to insure the prayers of the Community for your aunt as a benefactor—and a neat sum to faithful Lena, Bertha Ashmere has left our little one her entire fortune, consisting of an estate in England, her beautiful home in Albany, the old Virginia plantation, and investments of various kinds. So you and I must resign ourselves to the fate of 'poor relations,'" he concluded, laughing.

"We don't care for the money just so we have her, do we? It was nice, though, yesterday, to have those checks for the poor women, and I told Mrs. Rooney that you would go down there about three o'clock. That will give her plenty of time after dinner to get things in order."

"Ow-ow-ow! Oo-oo-oo-oo!!"

Both sprang to their feet and peered into the dark corner behind the chair, whence the uproar proceeded.

"My poor little child, did I rock on you!" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Ow-ow! Oo-oo-oo!" was the only response.

"Please pull the chair out a little, Uncle, so I can get in there. That's far enough."

Mary crept into the corner and put her arms around the cause of all the commotion, saying coaxingly, "Come to Mary and tell her all about it. Did you bump your head?"

"Oh, no, no," wailed Berta, shrinking farther into the darkness and hiding her face against the wall.

"Come out into the light, do, Berta. If you are hurt, Uncle can fix it. He's a doctor, you know."

But no amount of coaxing could prevail on the child, and Uncle Frank was obliged to go to Mary's assistance.

"Now then, what is the trouble?" he inquired, as he seated himself with the little one on his knee.

"It's—it's my nose—oo! oo! my poor, yitty nose!"

"Did you bump it, Berta? Do take your hands down so Uncle can see it," pleaded Mary.

"Oh, no, no! It's *off!* Oo! oo!"

Mary, really frightened, seized the chubby hands and jerked them away from the tear-stained face.

"Why Berta!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Your nose *isn't* off. It's on just as tight as it ever was. Feel it and see."

Berta ceased sobbing, while with her thumb and forefinger she gingerly felt the injured member. But the big tears began to flow afresh.

"Oo, oo! It do hurt anyway, drefful bad, so it do."

"Well, tell Uncle how you hurt it. He will put something on it so it won't hurt any more," urged Mary.

"I dot in behind ze chair, an'—I—twawled awound ze ozzer—side—'tause I wanted—to smell—zat pitty yitty wed fing on ze end of Uncle's bwown stick, and ow! ow! ow!——"

The Doctor looked in bewilderment at Mary who whispered, "She burned her nose on your cigar, Uncle. Your hand was hanging down by the chair." Then aloud, "But you must stop crying Berta, or Uncle can't cure it. Now, shut your eyes and he'll fix it so it won't hurt any more—don't wrinkle your nose all up like that; you won't leave any room on it for the medicine." While she talked, Mary went to the table and returned with the bowl of powdered sugar. "Keep your eyes shut tight and hold real still." Then she motioned to her uncle to sprinkle some sugar on the little burned spot. The Doctor obeyed, smiling at the novel cure.

"How does that feel?" he inquired, seriously. "Is the pain better?"

"Why, it am all well alweady."

"Mary, I shall engage you as a most valuable assistant. By the way, where are those pretty things I found under my plate? Aunt Mary was so worried about that precious beef-steak, that she caused them to disappear most unceremoniously. There they are on the side table."

Mary handed him the gifts she and Berta had made and seated herself on the arm of his chair, prepared to make any necessary explanations.

"Maywy's first, 'tause she's ze biddest."

"Very well," replied Uncle.

"It's all my very own work, Uncle. Sister would have touched it up for me, but I knew you would rather have it this way. Of course, she told me where I made mistakes, and I tried to correct them the next time."

"Yes, I can see the improvement in each drawing. You could give me nothing that I would appreciate more than this, and I know that you have not been wearing out your eyes by artificial light, nor depriving yourself of your outdoor recreation to make it. And now," taking up Berta's book, "what is this work of art?"

"I made it all by *mine* own self, too,—all 'cept ze first one. Maywy showed me how wif *zat* one."

"My, my!" exclaimed the Doctor, as his eyes fell on the pages before him. "These flowers ought to be exhibited at the Horticultural Show. They would certainly take the prize for color!"

"No, no. Ze hossies am back here. See!" said Berta proudly turning the leaves to a barn-yard scene, where blue horses, purple pigs, green cows, and pink sheep mingled serenely with chickens and ducks of every hue in the rainbow.

"Wonderful! truly wonderful. You have a great eye for color, my dear little girl."

Berta beamed delightedly up at him.

"Here am some more amanals; zat's a bear and zis am a tagger—does 'oo fink he plays tag wif all ze ozzer amanals, Uncle? And here's a breeza. Isn't he ze tootest yitty fing, Uncle?"

"*Zebra,*" corrected Mary.

"Ess, a zebya. Oh, I wis' I had a yitty zebya so I tould go widing on his back; don't 'oo, Maywy?"

"I should say not! Why, that animal would kick up

his heels and send us flying over his head! I'd much rather ride in Mr. Daniel's wheel-barrow."

"But Patwick tould hold his heels so he touldn't tick 'em up. I finks a zebya is ze bery nicest of all ze amanals, eben Danny's wheely-ba'l. Oh, no, I fordot! Ze effalunt am ze bery nicest and ze zebya tums next. Here's ze effalunt, Uncle. *Isn't* he toot? Maywy told me a story 'bout a effalunt what took care of a yitty dirl not as bid as me. Ven ze yitty dirl wanted to go to fleep, ze effalunt made a cwadle out of ze end of his twunk and zen wocked her to fleep. Wouldn't 'oo like to have a nice bid effalunt wock 'oo to fleep, Uncle?"

"Hardly," laughed the Doctor. "In the first place, when bedtime comes I am so tired that I need no rocking to put me to sleep; and in the second, I much prefer a stationary bed."

"Berta worked very hard to finish her book, Uncle."

"I am sure she did. And you made it all for me? Weren't you very tired?"

"Ess," said the child, simply. "Sometimes my poor yitty finners hurt drefful much, but," slipping her arm about his neck and resting her cheek against his, "I didn't mind *zat,* betause I was makin' it all for my dweat fwend, an' to'mornin' I is goin' to make a bidder book for 'oo, 'tause now 'oo is my weally Uncle Fwank."

"You must rest for a few days before beginning it," said her uncle, much touched by the little one's affection. "Make me another book for Easter."

"Uncle," asked Mary, eagerly, "isn't it time to telephone? Oh, I forgot to tell you there is a big box downstairs from them, with things in it for both of us. I didn't open mine, because it's so much nicer for us to do it together."

"Will it not be better to attend to that first? Then we can thank them more intelligently for their gifts. Besides, I think it will be wiser to phone about noon when we can be sure that they are all home from Church."

Their appearance in the recreation room was hailed with delight. Everyone had something about which to consult "Mary's uncle."

"But girls," remonstrated Margaret, "The Doctor hasn't seen any of Mary's things yet."

So the eager little crowd withdrew to the other end of the room, there to await the good man's leisure.

"See, Uncle, the box is divided. That half is yours, and this, mine. Let's open all your presents and lay them on the table."

Together they opened package after package, until a handsome desk set lay before them.

"Now, mine. This is from Aunt Etta. O Uncle, look," and the delighted child placed on his knee a flat box containing a beautiful lace collar and pair of cuffs. "She made them herself. I saw her working on them, but thought they were for Wilhelmina. See the dear little pin on the collar, a tennis racket from Uncle Phil. Oh! aren't they too good!"

"By the way, I never quite understood about that tennis game. What was it, anyway?"

"Why," said Mary with a laugh, "There isn't much to tell about it. I couldn't disgrace *you,* and it wouldn't have been polite to beat *him,* so I thought a tie would fix it all right."

"Hm," observed her uncle. "Well, what else have you there?"

"This is for Berta. Where is she? Berta, come see what Wilhelmina's mother sent you," she called to her little sister, who stood gazing in open-eyed wonder at the tree. Mary placed the carefully wrapped package in the child's hands and turned once more to the box.

"Here is something from Wilhelmina—a brass kettle for my tea-table—and here is the stand for it, from Phil. He made it himself, Uncle, in the Manual Training Class at school. Another flat box—from Harry—a calendar. That's his own work, too, and he says he

made up the poetry on it. I think Harry's a genius. Why, that stage-curtain he painted is wonderful!"

The Doctor tried to hide the smile caused by the remembrance of Harry's artistic efforts. Fortunately Mary's head was once more bent over the box.

"See what the twins sent,—a box of all kinds of whistles. Wasn't it good of them to make them, Uncle? But I really don't see what I'll ever use them for. And look at the packages and packages of flower seeds Joe saved me from his garden. I must ask Mr. Daniel to let me have a little corner where I can plant them. Here is the very last thing in the box—it's a picture—oh! isn't that dear!" placing on Uncle's knee a large framed photograph of the three youngest Marvins,—Dick and Jack in the goat-cart, and Freddie standing proudly at Billy's head.

"Nennybody never will look at my Aunt Mandy," murmured Berta, who stood at a little distance with a doll representing an old colored mammy in her arms.

"Why Berta, do you remember Aunt Mandy?" cried Mary in surprise.

"In course I does! 'Oo finks I fordets all my old fwends."

"Does Aunt Mandy know about Berta, Uncle?"

"No, Mary. She went early in the week, to spend Christmas with her sister who lives somewhere in New Jersey, and yesterday morning when I found I would not be home for a few days, I sent Tom and Liza to join her. So they know nothing of all this."

"Won't they be surprised! You'll be glad to see Aunt Mandy again, won't you, Berta? But goodness me, you poor child! You haven't seen one of your presents yet. Come over here and look at what Santa Claus brought you. Uncle told him to bring you that rocking chair. Sit down in it and see if it is comfortable."

"Twite tumfy, fank 'oo," said Berta seriously, rocking back and forth in the pretty wicker chair.

"And I asked Santa Claus to bring you this lamb. See, you can wind him up—so," and to Berta's delight, the animal ran about the floor baaing in the most natural manner possible.

"Maywy had a yitty yamb!" cried the child dancing about, clapping her hands gleefully.

"*Berta* had a little lamb," corrected her sister. "But what *do* you imagine is in this great big box? I think I can guess," she declared, looking knowingly at the little trunk and doll-carriage which stood close by. "Come, help me lift off the cover. It's big enough, anyway."

"Sh! Maywy. Sh! Yitty sissoo afleep."

Mary was startled. "No, Berta, no, it's only a big doll. See!" she insisted, lifting it from the box and standing it on the floor.

"Oh!" said Berta, plainly disappointed. "I fought it was my yitty sissoo, tum back to play wif me. But she isn't bid 'nuf."

"Does she look like Beth, darling?" whispered Mary.

"Pitty much. Bef had yitty turls what jumped when I pulled 'em jes' easy, and she always had bew wibbons."

"What's this at the back of her neck. There are three things like keys. I'm going to wind one and see what happens."

Presently, from the doll's parted lips came quite plainly the words, "How do you do? I am very glad to see you," and other set phrases. All the children gathered about the wonderful toy.

"Wind another key, Mary, and see what she will do next," they demanded, and soon Miss Dolly began to sing a French song.

"There must be a graphophone inside her," cried Mary, while Berta's dark eyes grew wide with amazement.

"Now for the third key," and to the astonishment of

all, the doll walked across the room. Mary seized the lamb, and, hastily winding it, sent it off after the doll. Oh! what an uproar.

"Maywy had a yitty yamb, yitty yamb, yitty yamb," screamed Berta, and with great spirit the girls finished the song.

When the excitement had subsided, Mary turned to the trunk.

"Girls! did you ever see anything so cute? Here are a summer hat, a fan, a parasol, and white gloves and shoes; and in the other side of the tray are all winter things, even a fur collar and muff. Do look at the rain-coat and umbrella,—*and rubbers.* Here's a whole knitted suit—cap, jacket, leggings, and mittens. Oh! see this dear little velvet coat. The bottom of the trunk is full of dresses. O Berta, I'm afraid I'll have to borrow your beautiful doll sometimes."

"Of tourse 'oo tan play wif her all 'oo want to," said big-hearted little Berta.

"Look at the building-blocks and the dishes and the furniture," cried the girls. "Sister will have to give you a separate room for all these things."

"Oo tan all have some," sighed the child, quite bewildered at the sight of so many treasures. "I is going to sit by side Uncle for a yitty while," picking up her chair and placing it close to the Doctor, who sat before the fire conversing with his sister.

Mary, after putting things in some kind of order, also joined the little group.

"Are we going home with you this evening, Uncle?"

"I shall stay with the Chaplain again tonight, Mary. Tomorrow I must return to Albany, but I shall come back here for you in the afternoon and take you home with me for a few days.

"By the way, when do you intend to entertain your little friends? I think," turning to Mother Madeline, "that the finding of our little pet here, warrants a celebration somewhat out of the ordinary. So you must

let me have my way for this once, and allow all these children to spend a day with us in town."

"But Frank," remonstrated the religious, "think of Aunt Mandy. The poor old soul would be distracted with this noisy crowd about her all day."

"We shall attend to that. She can sit in the corner and oversee the work in the kitchen, and Liza will get some strong young woman to assist her. Mary, will you have time in the morning to write invitations to your little friends in the city? I shall see that they are delivered before night. Saturday will probably be the best day. I shall arrange for someone to bring these children in early in the morning, and you can have your party in the afternoon. Go now and invite them all."

Mary danced away to the other end of the room.

"Girls, you are all invited to spend Saturday at Uncle's," she announced, and proceeded to unfold the plans for the day.

"A party in the afternoon! But Mary, we haven't any party dresses here."

"Wear what you have on. The mothers of those girls I know in the city are sensible people, and they don't dress their children in silks and satins. Nobody will look one bit better than we do, today."

"Well, I guess I'm out of it," sighed Florence. "Look at me now, and by night this dress won't be fit to be seen."

"No indeed! nobody's out of it. You all *must* come to my function. Josephine, please behave yourself for the next two days so Sister won't have to keep you home. If the dresses need to be done up, Mrs. Rooney will have them ready Friday evening. Wear your uniforms on the train and put on the white ones when you get there."

These important points being settled, Mary returned to the fireside.

It is nearly time for noon prayers, but I shall see you again," said Mother Madeline.

"That bell means five minutes to twelve, Uncle."

"Very well. We shall go up now to telephone."

"Will you call first and get them, Uncle? I'm always kind of shaky about that part of it."

The Doctor gave the number, and, after some minutes, Mr. Marvin answered.

"A happy Christmas, Phil. Are you all at home?"

"Why, Frank, this is an unexpected pleasure. Yes, we are all here together."

"Mary has a great piece of news which a letter would not carry to you fast enough. I think she wishes to tell Aunt Etta first."

He handed the receiver to the little girl, while Mr. Marvin called his wife to the phone.

"Please have the whole family around you, Aunt Etta, so you can tell them as soon as I tell you. Now, are you all ready? Well, the little girl I told you about isn't Bertha Ashmere at all—she's Berta, our own darling Berta!"

"My dear, dear child, how glad—" but her speech was interrupted by "What is it, mother? What is it? I heard Bertha's name," and the shout with which her message was received convinced Mary that her Georgia friends were of those who "rejoice with them that rejoice."

"Yes, Aunt Etta," she continued, "Aunt Bertha had her, but she was sorry, and now she's dead; but I'm going to write you a long letter tomorrow."

"Just a moment, Mary. Wilhelmina wishes to speak to you."

"O Mary, I'm just tickled to death! We all are. Put her up on a chair. I must talk to her."

"It's my Willy-mean," cried Berta excitedly, when she heard the familiar voice. "Where 'oo is, Willy-mean?"

"Talk louder, Berta. Talk as loud as you can," insisted Wilhelmina; and aside to the eager group around her, "I want you all to hear her."

"Am 'oo in zat yitty bwown botz, Willy mean? O Uncle, *p'ease* open zat botz. I want to see my Willy-mean."

The hearty laugh which greeted these remarks was distinctly heard by Mary and her uncle.

"Who zat laughing, Willy-mean? Uncle tan't open ze botz."

"Wait a minute, Berta. I want mother to speak to you. But you must talk louder."

"How do you do, Berta? I wish I could see you as well as talk to you."

"I is bery happy to make 'oor 'twaintance," screamed Berta, in strict accordance with Wilhelmina's directions. "Who *am* zat laughing, anyway?"

"Those are my little boys, who can hardly wait until summer time to see you. You are coming down to Georgia with Mary, you know."

"No ma'am, I don't know nennybody named Georgie. Jes' Willy-mean."

Then Uncle took the receiver and after a few words with Mr. Marvin returned it to its hook.

"May we go with you to Mrs. Rooney's, Uncle?" asked Mary at the dinner table.

"I am afraid Berta will find it too long a walk."

"We can ride her on my sled if you don't think it's too cold for her."

"Not a bit, and I shall be very glad to have company."

It was nearly half-past two when the three set out on their errand of mercy.

"Isn't there room for you, too, on the sled, Mary?"

"Plenty, Uncle, but I'd rather walk with you. We can talk better this way."

Mrs. Rooney and Tommie were expecting them, and great was the joy of both when the Doctor declared that two months in the hospital would make the boy as well as anybody.

"I have a room of my own there, Mrs. Rooney," he said, "and it will make me very happy if your boy will occupy it."

"What funny peoples," soliloquized Berta, as they started down the road. "Zey is cwying when zey ought to be laughing. Mrs. Wooney she say, 'I is so happy as nennyfing.' An zis morning, Maywy did say, 'I is so happy,' too, and zen zey bofe cwy. Bery funny peoples, I finks."

On the way up the drive, Mary suggested that they call on Daniel and Patrick. They found the two men in a cozy little sitting-room which they had fixed up in the barn.

"Yes, Miss Mary," said Dan, "we heard the good news, but we didn't expect to see you today. We might ha' known Miss Berta belonged to you. Not that you favor each other, but she has your ways, Miss Mary, she has, indeed. We were just considerin', Patrick and I, as to whether we'd be intrudin' if we went up yonder to thank you for your gifts. I've spent most of the day areadin' that er magazine, and I've larned a heap. I thought I knowed most all there was to know about growin' things, but I find I don't."

"One of those books will be sent you every month, Dan," explained the Doctor. "You can let Mary know at the end of the year whether they are worth anything to you. If so, we shall renew the subscription."

"Thank'ee, sir, thank'ee."

"I have some tickets here," continued the Doctor, "which you and Patrick may care to make use of. There is a very fine Horticultural Show going on this week, and, if you can spare a day, it will be worth your while to see it."

"This is our dull season, Doctor, and we have time

on our hands. It's nigh on to twenty years since I've been to New York, but Patrick will keep me from losing myself."

"A thought just occurred to me. If the day makes no difference to you, would you have any objection to bringing the little girls who are spending the holidays here, in to my place early Saturday morning, and calling for them again in the evening? I shall take Mary and Berta with me tomorrow, and that will leave eight for you to look after."

"Four ladies apiece, Doctor, is a big handful for a lone man," said the old gardener, dubiously, "but I guess we're equal to it, Patrick and I—I guess we're equal to it."

"Thank you, Dan. That relieves me of all anxiety on that point. Children, Aunt Mary will think we are lost."

After supper, the little girls gathered about the tree to receive from the Doctor the mysterious packages which had all day excited their curiosity. He also distributed the goodies with which its branches were laden, but none of the ornaments were removed, for the tree was to be left in its place until the holidays were over.

"I was afraid it would look so bare after being stripped of all these things," said Mary, "but no one would know that anything had been taken off it."

"Except those who got the presents," laughed Isabel.

"There is the Benediction bell, children," announced Mother Madeline.

A half-hour later, having closed the front door after her brother and the Chaplain, she turned to accompany her little nieces down the hall.

"Isn't it a pity, Aunt Mary, that such a happy, happy day has to come to an end?" sighed Mary, as they neared her bed-room.

"But there will be many happy days in the future, Mary, please God. And now isn't it bedtime for little folks?"

"I s'pose it is, but I just hate to be separated from Berta, even during the night."

"Why need you be?" asked her aunt, turning on the light in the room.

"Why, we're in the wrong place. No, we're not! Berta, Berta, look! There's your crib, and this is your room just as well as mine. Oh, you dear, dear Auntie!"

Mother Madeline's guimpe was somewhat the worse for the demonstrations of gratitude which ensued.

"After your return from your visit to Uncle's, we shall move you into the room below Wilhelmina's. It is larger and better suited for two beds."

"I'll ask Uncle to send out Berta's brass crib from home. It will match my bed and look better than the white one. You know," she added sadly, "he had the dearest room fixed up for the twins, right next to mother's."

"But where we are to put all Berta's new toys, remains to be seen," continued Mother, anxious to divert Mary's mind to more joyous subjects.

"We'll find room for them, Aunt Mary. Even in here, the closet is large, and on account of our clothes being in the wardrobe room upstairs, we haven't much to hang up."

"Can I help you get ready for bed, Berta?"

"I'll help her, Aunt Mary. She's a pretty good girl about doing things for herself, though."

"Very well. I shall say good-night and go to recreation with the Sisters," and with a fervent "God bless you," she left them.

* * * * * *

It was growing late, Sunday afternoon. The Doctor's cozy library was in darkness save for the glow of the grate fire, which lighted up the faces of the two little girls seated before it in a big leather chair. For some moments their conversation had been on the events of the previous afternoon.

"Josy-feem am a bery nice yitty dirl, ven she am dood."

"I guess we all are," responded Mary.

"Didn't Uncle look funny dancing wif her and Helen?"

"Not half as funny as when he took you for a partner in the Virginia Reel," declared the elder child, laughing gaily at the remembrance. "Uncle is *so* good. He makes everyone fell right at home. I know the girls had the best time."

A long pause ensued. Then Berta, with her gaze fixed on the fire, began, "Am all zose dirls' muzzers in Hebben?"

"Oh no, Berta, only a few of their mothers are dead."

"Did Aunt Berfa hold zem tight so zey touldn't go wif zere muzzers to Hebben?"

"No, no, Berta, those girls didn't know our Aunt Bertha at all."

"Zen why for zey didn't go to Hebben wif zere muzzers? O Maywy, I fordot aden," whispered the child, clinging to her sister and peering about her into the darkness.

"Berta, there's nothing to be afraid of," insisted Mary, putting her arm about the child. "You can talk about mother and Beth all you want to; Aunt Bertha wouldn't mind, now. Besides, she has gone to Heaven."

"*No, no,* only dood peoples tan go to Hebben, and she was *bad.*"

"But she got good before she died. If she hadn't written that letter, we wouldn't know that you are our Berta at all. So you see she was sorry, and God forgave her and took her to Heaven."

"But she made muzzer cwy," protested Berta, her little lips quivering at the memory.

"Tell me about mother, darling,—everything you can remember," pleaded Mary, yearning for the smallest detail of those three long years. "How did Aunt Bertha ever get you away from mother?"

"Why, don't 'oo know? We was hurrying up jes' as fast as nennyfing. Muzzer was tarrying Bef 'tause she was afleep, and I was holding muzzer's hand and wunning along by side her, and pitty soon Aunt Berfa tame, but muzzer neber did say she was Aunt Berfa, neber, neber at all. Zen she tarried me, and I was af'aid of her eyes, Maywy. We went up'tairs and out ze door, and it was dark night, and a big man wif shiny buttons helped muzzer and Bef into a yitty wite boat, and Auntie wouldn't let me go, and she did say to muzzer, 'I will teep 'oor child,' and poor muzzer cwied, so she did." A violent fit of sobbing put an end to Berta's story.

"There, there, darling, don't cry like that. Mother and Beth are happy now in Heaven, and some day you and I will go there, too."

"T'mornin'?" questioned Berta eagerly, while Mary dried the tears from the flushed little face.

"Not tomorrow, I guess, but some day, perhaps not very far away. Why! I do believe I forgot to tell you about the party Patrick is going to have. He told me yesterday. Instead of one like ours, he's going to take all us girls for a long sleigh-ride out into the country to his sister's home. We'll stay there for dinner and come back to the Convent late in the afternoon. Patrick's sister has the dearest, sweetest little baby. You will like to see it, won't you?"

"How bid is it? As bid as me?"

"Oh no, it's a teeny, weeny baby in long clothes; not much bigger than your new dolly."

"And tan it walk and talk and sing a Fwench song?"

"Why Berta, of course not. You can't sing a French song yourself. But," she hastened to add as she saw the little one's interest beginning to flag, "it can cry—oh! it can cry as loud as anything, and," triumphantly, "you don't have to wind it up, either."

"I don't like cwy-babies," was the disgusted answer.

"But maybe its mother will show you its little pink toes. I'll ask her."

"How many has it dot?" demanded Berta, once more becoming interested.

"Why, ten, of course. Everybody has ten toes."

"Oh," said Berta, lapsing into silence and gazing into the fire. Mary, too, fixed her eyes on the glowing coals, while she swiftly recalled the incidents related by Berta. Could her little sister remember so accurately a scene of which she had merely dreamed? Or was it possible for a child of her age to imagine such a thing? Mary seriously doubted the little one's capability of doing either; but since her uncle would not consider her views on the matter, she resolved to wait and talk them over with Aunt Mary.

"Maywy, I was talking to 'oo free, seben, *ten* times, and 'oo neber did say nennyfing to me."

"Were you, pet? I never heard you. Oh, see the pretty picture in the fire," and reaching for the poker, Mary proceeded to point out the various details of the scene which her fancy painted there. "See, here's a hill with Christmas trees growing on it, and here's Santa Claus coming up to chop some down. There are his sleigh and reindeer on the road at the foot of the hill, and here's a little house with a light in the window and smoke coming out of the chimney. There's another house across the road, but it's all dark, so I s'pose the people have gone to bed. Now, it's your turn to show me a picture," giving the coals a vigorous poke which sent a shower of sparks flying up the chimney.

"Stars! stars!" cried Berta, clapping her hands, "and zat dreat bid one am ze Star of Befalum."

So intent did they become that they did not hear Uncle's latchkey in the door; and he, concluding from the darkness and silence which reigned in the front part of the house, that the children were with Liza in the kitchen, was about to turn on the lights, when a murmur of voices attracted his attention and caused him to tip-toe to the library door. A long while he stood admiring the pretty picture before him. The great leather chair served as a splendid back-ground for the two little

figures, which leaned far forward from its depths, their eager faces flushed with the glow of the fire. Its light glinted from Mary's golden head, which rested lovingly on the soft dark curls of the younger child about whom her protecting arm was thrown, while with the poker she indicated the objects so interesting to both.

Overcome by his longing to join them, the Doctor at last made his presence known.

"Well, well, well! This is pleasant," he exclaimed, advancing towards the fire.

With a cry, the little girls sprang from the chair, the poker falling on the fender with a clatter that brought Liza from the kitchen.

"I dot him first, I dot him first," cried Berta, seizing his hand and holding it to her burning cheek. "Oo is nice and tool."

"And you are nice and warm. We are going to have a cold night."

"How did you ever get in without our hearing you, Uncle? We watched at the window until dark——"

"Ess, until all ze yitty suns began to tum out."

"There's imagination for you! The sun has not shown his face for two days and there has been no moon for a week."

"Oh, not zat *bid* sun, Uncle, but all ze *yitty* suns," protested Berta. "Tum, I'll show 'oo," leading him to the window. "See, all ze yitty suns am out," indicating, with a graceful wave of her chubby hand, the lamps in the street below. The Doctor laughed heartily, and throwing himself in the big chair before the fire, took her on his knee, while Mary sat on a low stool at his feet.

"The mercury is falling rapidly. I fear we are in for a very cold spell."

"What's zat—*murklee?*"

"Mercury is quicksilver, a substance with a disposition very like yours—never still a minute."

"Poor Murklee!" murmured the child, gazing into the fire, "I hope he won't hurt hisself. It always hurts me drefful bad ven nennybody falls me down."

"You said the mercury is falling, Uncle," laughed Mary.

"So I did. I must remember that I have a very small niece as well as a larger one."

"But I isn't as yitty as ze baby."

Then Mary told Uncle of the treat Patrick had in store for them.

"Indeed, if it were not for the fact that I must leave town for a few days, I should insist on keeping you here until the vacation is over. You cannot imagine how pleasant it is to come home and find two dear little folks waiting for me. Aunt Mary must really take pity on my declining years and allow you to come in here oftener."

"What's zat?"

"What is *what?*"

"Tlimbing ears?"

"Oh, I should have said 'on my old age.'"

"But 'oo isn't so *bery* old—not as old as Sandy Tlaus," declared Berta, triumphantly.

"Well, hardly," laughed the Doctor, "but one might live a very long time indeed, and not be as old as your friend. Why do you think I am not as old as Santa Claus?"

"Betause 'oor hair isn't wite like his, and 'oo hasn't wite wiksers. Oh, I wish 'oo had wiksers," she added, her eyes dancing with mischief.

"Why, pray?"

"So I tould pull em a yitty bit ven 'oo pulls my turls."

"Oho! Tit for tat, eh? But I must stop plaguing you. It isn't fair, is it? Mary, what is the matter with the piano, this evening?"

"Nothing at all, Uncle," said the little girl, rising and taking her place at the instrument.

"Shall I turn on the light?"

"I don't need it, Uncle, for the things you like. I can play them with my eyes shut, because I practice them more than anything else."

After playing several of his favorites, she struck the opening chords of a kindergarten song.

"Sing about the snow-birds for Uncle, Berta. He has never heard you."

"Not *zat* song, Maywy," protested the little lady, disdainfully. "Let's sing 'Smarty, smarty had a party, and nennybody wouldn't tum.'"

"Such a song!" exclaimed Mary, wheeling about on the stool. "Where did you *ever* hear that?"

"Josy-feem sings it lots of times," declared Berta, somewhat abashed.

"Well, it's not a pretty song at all; how do you s'pose we would have felt if nobody came to our party?"

"Let sing about ze yitty birdies," interrupted Berta, hastily, and when the performance had been duly praised by Uncle, she said, "Now, Maywy, play *Desty Fiddlzez.*"

"Play *what?*" asked the Doctor in a puzzled tone.

"*Desty Fiddlzez.* Why *ev'ybody* knows *zat.*" . .

"I think you had better stick to plain English, my dear, for some years to come," laughed her uncle, as Mary obediently began the "Adeste."

The remainder of the holidays passed quickly. Mary and Berta spent the last four days at Uncle Frank's, returning to the Convent late Wednesday afternoon. There they were the center of attraction, for though each pupil on her arrival at Maryvale heard of the great event before she had time to divest herself of her wraps, there were numberless questions concerning minor details, which no one but the principal actors could satisfactorily answer. Mary had thought that she would never tire of telling how her wonderful happiness had

come to her, but when an hour had elapsed and she saw several groups of late arrivals eagerly approaching to hear the story, she was not at all sorry to receive the message, "You and Berta are wanted in the parlor."

"Whoever can it be! Uncle brought us out here and then went straight back to the city," she exclaimed, examining Berta's hands with motherly solicitude. "They're nothing extra, but they might be worse. We can't stop to wash them again, because it isn't p'lite to keep people waiting in the parlor. Your dress is nice and clean, anyway," and taking her little sister by the hand, she hurried away.

"Who does 'oo fink it am, Maywy?"

"I haven't the least idea, Berta," then, as a merry peal of laughter issued from the parlor, she stopped abruptly, saying, "That's Wilhelmina, and she's playing a joke on us. But we'll play one on her, too. When we go in, we won't kiss her, but we'll hold our hands *so*, and walk this way and say, 'Why, how *do* you do, Miss Marvin?' "

"An' tan I say, 'Bery happy to make 'oor twaintance?' "

"Yes, yes, do! That will be fine. Now, I'll sit here and pretend I'm Wilhelmina, and you show me how you are going to act."

Berta withdrew a few paces, and pursing up her rosy lips, clasped her hands primly before her and took little mincing steps towards Mary, who had all she could do to smother her glee.

"Now, we'll go in. No, we won't take hands, because we are going to hold them this way, you know."

However, as they entered the parlor, Mary's dignity suddenly evaporated, and with a joyous little scream, she sped to Aunt Etta's outstretched arms.

"Why! why! 'oo said——" but Berta's indignant protest was cut short by Wilhelmina's none too gentle embrace.

"Mother, mother, have you eyes for no one but Mary? After coming a thousand miles to see Berta, you haven't even looked at her!"

"I shall do more than look at her, I assure you," declared the good lady, taking the child in her arms and seating herself in the nearest chair. "So this is the little girl who has brought so much happiness to us all. I just couldn't wait until summer time to see my new niece, but stole away with Wilhelmina."

Then Mother Madeline came in and insisted that Mrs. Marvin should remain over night. After her departure the following day, Wilhelmina and Mary settled down quite naturally to the routine of school life; and the next Sunday the latter declared to her uncle, "To look at the girls, no one would ever think there had been a Christmas vacation at all."

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